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THE GIRL FROM U.N.C.L.E.

is APRIL DANCER—U.N.C.L.E.'S secret weapon: all female, all dynamite—targeting her explosive talents on

THE BLAZING AFFAIR

by MICHAEL AVALLONE

A novel based on the NEW NBC TELEVISION network series starring Stephanie Powers and Noel Harrison

The Blazing Affair

Number II of *The Girl From U.N.C.L.E.*

Michael Avallone

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GREAT FAT SPIDERS

scuttled obscenely across the floor. On they came, a silent armada, fastening their tentacles to the bedcover, climbing closer to the frozen April Dancer. Deadly black widows. Compliments of TORCH.

TORCH was the name that sent Mr. Waverly's blood pressure sky high. TORCH was the assignment from which no U.N.C.L.E. agent has yet returned. TORCH was the blazing trail that April Dancer and Mark Slate followed from a hotel room in Budapest to a deserted mine shaft in Johannesburg. TORCH was the secret international organization led by a scar-faced maniac who called himself Der Fuhrer!

And if Der Fuhrer's plans for a world holocaust and Fourth Reich were being bugged, it was because TORCH had run into U.N.C.L.E.'s most powerful secret weapon. Namely, April Dancer.

the girl from
U.N.C.L.E.
The Blazing Affair

By Michael Avallone

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For the Uninitiated

The letters U.N.C.L.E. stand for *United Network Command of Law Enforcement.* This is an organization of unusual quality and outstanding ability; its main function is to defeat the forces of global operations which seek to subjugate civilization as we know it beneath the hell and totalitarianism of tyranny.

To combat all the deadly *isms*, there is U.N.C.L.E. No other arm of counterintelligence and espionage exists in which the range of counter-*ism* endeavor is so nonparochial and far-flung. The personnel of U.N.C.L.E. is intentionally multinational and multilingual. All races, colors and creeds combine their efforts to block any world power or underground organization which attempts to unbalance the scheme of things by force.

U.N.C.L.E. is subdivided into six sections:

SECTION I: Policy and Operations

SECTION II: Operations and Enforcement

SECTION III: Enforcement and Intelligence

SECTION IV: Intelligence and Communications

SECTION V: Communications and Security

SECTION VI: Security and Personnel

There is a profitable overlap of one Section into another. Section II is perhaps the most vital of all the departments in that it is there that the all-important job of *execution* of the work of the other five sections truly solidifies into reality.

For there is one country, one force, one power, whose entire *raison d'etre* is world domination. Out of this country has come an organization of supra-people who seek to rule the universe and is known by the code name of THRUSH.

U.N.C.L.E. is the only answer for THRUSH.

No one has ever learned what the lettered name of a bird symbolizes.

But it is not the dove of peace. It is the bird of war. All-out, deadly, no-holds-barred war.

U.N.C.L.E. has the men to stop them.

And the women.

Introduction to an Agent

The assassin waiting patiently on the tarred roof above Rosten Boulevard checked his rifle once more to make certain all was in readiness. The range he had estimated at two hundred yards, allowing for the moving vehicle. He knew the Crown Prince would be flanked by the two burly Secret Police officials who never left his side. No matter. The rifle was high-powered, cross-haired to the thousandth of an inch, and the ammunition was .30-.30 caliber. The cartridges had been flattened at their noses for expansion. When the Crown Prince's body became framed in the telescopic sight lenses, it would be but a second. Even a glancing shot would spread into a gaping fatal wound. Then indeed would the death of a nobleman come, marking the beginning of a gloriously new and different regime in Ostarkia. The world would see the dawn of a great movement…

Trumpets blared suddenly. The throngs lining the paved walks cheered lustily. Flags, pennants, and handkerchiefs fluttered in gay abandon. The assassin crouched over his weapon, every line of his body ready, the rifle an unwavering line. The motorcade of Rolls Royces and Mercedes-Benz touring cars had swung from Halsen Street, as he had known it would, into Rosten for the procession past the Prime Minister's headquarters.

The Crown Prince's car, an open vehicle specially constructed for such tours as this one, rolled forward.

Music filled the air, horns chorused, the people of Ostarkia roared hoarsely. The dark shining limousine bearing the still-boyish Crown Prince drew nearer, a motorcycle escort racing ahead to clear the way. The trumpets soared to a fanfare, wholly filling the atmosphere of the town square.

The assassin squinted through his telescopic sight.

The moment of comic tragedy had come. Weeks of endless plotting, the bribery of trusted officials, the deceit of politics, had brought the sweep hand of the watch strapped to his left wrist to that precise second when the Crown Prince must die. One delicate squeeze and…

Behind his crouched body, the roof door suddenly slammed in violent sound. The assassin whirled, the rifle coming to high port in his quaking arms. His eyes bulged in wonder and disbelief.

A woman stood framed in the entranceway, a scant ten yards from the parapet of the roof. The assassin had only a flashing instant to take in the American-cut afternoon dress of blue, the mocking smile on an extraordinarily pretty face, and the almost casual stance which suggested that all of this situation was indeed ridiculous.

The woman (she looked very young) was holding a chrome and black leather camera as though she were going to take his picture. The assassin, bewildered, for one mad moment imagined this was but one of those annoying cinema people who overran Ostarkia from time to time. Movie makers and tourists…

"Pity, Karwin," the woman said in a curiously mild, unexcited voice that spoke his own language as beautifully as it could be uttered. "As difficult as it might have been, I think you could have made that shot."

Karwin growled in his throat, the rifle pointing, his finger constricting on the heavy trigger. The woman in the doorway did not try to dodge.

But there was a blur of movement, a coughing sound lost in the medley of parade noises floating up from the street below, and a tiny puff of smoke materialized magically in the vicinity of the intruder's right hand. The camera had popped like an old-fashioned flashbulb device.

Karwin sagged back against the tarred slope of the parapet, still clutching the rifle. There was now a red mark visible in his broad, apish forehead, as if an annoying bee had scored a hit. He had never been able to get a shot off.

The remarkably attractive girl in the American-cut dress stepped back behind the door, closing it softly. The camera was now slung from her shoulder by a leather strap.

The limousine bearing the Crown Prince of Ostarkia swept slowly past Karwin's observation post. Ringing cheers of love and acclaim surrounded it. The Crown prince was standing erect, waving, his uniform immaculate and grand.

He was handsome, young, and nearly classic-looking in the bright and glorious sunlight.

He was also very much alive.

"Chloral hydrate." The little doctor down at the detention center said. "It is amazing but it seems to have been far more potent than usual. Karwin had been unconscious at least an hour when your people found him on the roof."

The police chief, a fierce-faced man with a great deal of braid and an equal amount of hatred, snorted.

"The telephone call came within minutes of the Crown Prince's entourage leaving Rosten Boulevard. These assassins! Clearly, Karwin's accomplice betrayed him. We shall have much to ask that worthy when we clear his head a bit. He is still babbling like an idiot."

The doctor shrugged, reaching for his overcoat, a tan ulster slung over a chair in the office. Politics was not his department.

Captain Dorset permitted himself a cold smile.

"All too true, Doctor. Still the phone call disturbs me. The man who took the message–Sergeant Freddo–says the voice was that of a woman."

"Mata Hari was a woman," the little doctor muttered without emphasis, waved his hand, and left the room.

Captain Dorset cursed fluently in his own language, now that he was alone. He shuddered to think what would have happened to the principality of Ostarkia had Karwin succeeded in his assassination. Was no one safe any longer in this highly dangerous age?

It would seem not.

Miss April Dancer was still carrying her camera when she returned to her side-street hotel. It was a pleasant enough hostelry, with clean, quiet rooms, a small lobby, and an elevator from the days of balls, cotillions, and great soirees where the peasantry met royalty on equal terms. Ostarkia was a throwback all the way. There were few automobiles, very little television, and not a whisper of the supermarket modernity that had overrun most of Europe. Ostarkia, lost in the high ranges of the Balkans, clung almost feverishly to the past. Perhaps that was why it had been such a perfect spot for an attempt by THRUSH to impose satrap limitations on its government. Monarchies were made for anarchists like THRUSH agents of Karwin's stamp.

There were no messages or phone calls for her at the tiny registration desk. The hotel clerk, a wolf-faced man with large hands, bowed in his courtly way when he set eyes on her again. The clerk was thoroughly approving of American tourists if they were women traveling alone. Women who boasted curves, wholesomeness, and all the visible attributes of April Dancer.

"Ah," he murmured with relish, his dark eyes raping her. "And the parade? Did you like it?"

"Real Fourth of July stuff," she agreed, speaking English because the clerk did. "Would you make out my bill, please?"

"You are leaving us so soon? When tomorrow is the Grand Promenade of the Blessed Virgin on Lake Oliveri–"

"Sorry. I'm due in New York on Monday. Can't traipse around Europe all the time, you know. I expect to leave the hotel by sundown so if you could arrange a car to take me to the airport, I'd be very grateful."

He sighed unhappily, his dark eyes rolling.

"If you must–you must–" He tried to take her hand as he handed her the room key but she skillfully avoided contact by sweeping the tag end from his fingers. She smiled at him, just to show him she wasn't offended by his enthusiasm.

She could still see him leering at her from the flowerpot-lined desk as the grilled elevator car rose feebly to the third floor. She had correctly pigeonholed the amorous clerk as a man on the make, but it was dangerous making snap judgments. You could never be too sure of anyone when the stakes were life and death.

Her room had been undisturbed, her luggage and clothes and personal effects as she had left them. She had taken the ordinary amount of routine precautions, leaving objects in a fixed position and making a line drawing of their arrangement in the room. When she checked the sketch against the room proper, everything matched. The hairs from her head that she had placed at strategic spots like door frames and windowsills were unbroken. To all appearances, Ostarkia had accepted her for what she was. Miss April Dancer, innocuous American tourist, who seemed to have little interest in the birds and the bees. She had worn glasses part of the time to enhance the characterization of clear-eyed, levelheaded career girl.

She stowed the camera in with the rest of the technological arsenal in her wardrobe suitcases. Mission accomplished. She had been sent to Ostarkia to block the attempt on the Crown Prince's life. Karwin was in the hands of the police. Score a big hit for U.N.C.L.E. The United Network Command of Law and Enforcement.

With the room door locked, she walked to the bed and clicked on a night lamp. From the drawer of the stand on which it rested, she produced a fountain pen. It was chrome and rather expensive-looking. She adjusted the clasp holder and it sprung ceiling ward, forming an antenna a full six inches high. A low *beeping* sound filled the room. A sound which could not have been heard in the corridor outside the room.

Ostarkia was quiet outside the hotel. Only the normal hum of activity and movement persisted. Cart wheels clattered on the cobblestones. A hawker's voice could be heard shouting the benefits to be derived from fresh mountain grapes and succulent cheeses of every description. She smiled to herself but all of her attention was on the communicator device poised in her hand.

A crisp, English-sounding voice filtered from the fountain pen.

"Yes, Miss Dancer?"

It never ceased to amaze her. The vast complexities of relays and boosters, the electronics wizardry of the age which enabled her to talk into a fountain pen to somebody in New York, thousands of miles away.

"The parade is over, Mr. Waverly. Scratch Karwin."

"Good, good. Any difficulties at all?"

"None as of this moment. I'm checking out tonight."

"I see. How were the mountains?"

Mr. Waverly might have been discussing a cure for warts, so avuncular and patient was his tone. April's smile widened. The old dear was about to spring a surprise on her. She knew him too well.

"Beautiful. But I have no more mountains to climb here."

"Just as well. I feel you should go on to Budapest. I have arranged for Mr. Slate to meet you there. Tomorrow. No later than, say, six o'clock, their time. He has all the details. You can both talk to me from there. Understood?"

"*Budapesh?"* she echoed. "You mean Hungary, of course."

"My dear Miss Dancer. Do not allow your fluency in languages to betray your special skills. You must watch that habit. Good luck and a safe journey to you."

"Roger and wilco. Signing out."

She lowered the antenna and the intermittent *beeps* ended. She frowned. Budapest. Hungary. Mark Slate. Something had to be up. She always teamed with the thin, green-eyed, guitar-playing ex-RAF pilot who had become such an important arm of the U.N.C.L.E organization. It would be great seeing him again, especially since she had left him in New York several weeks ago. The Karwin business had taken a great deal longer than expected. So may leads to ferret out and run down before she had been able to pinpoint the assassin's presence on the roof that under-the-table monies had left unguarded.

Now, all that was left was getting out of Ostarkia with a whole skin. Karwin had to have some friends. Or possibly, he might break down under police questioning and give a perfect description of the woman who had done him in.

She couldn't hang around waiting for the Crown Prince to send her his personal thanks for saving his life. That wasn't the order of things with U.N.C.L E. He didn't know about her anyway, wasn't supposed to know, and she would have to get her satisfaction for doing the deed as she always did. From her own unerring, inescapable involvement with wanting the world to spin properly on its axis, without world-domination fanatics like THRUSH upsetting the scheme of things.

THRUSH never stopped trying. She wouldn't be too surprised if the rendezvous with Mark Slate in Budapest meant more of the same. In the two short, hectic, impossible years she had spent as a girl from U.N.C.L.E., it had been THRUSH that had kept her the busy little agent she was.

Even Mr. Waverly had once remarked, in one of his few excursions into personal opinion: "They never stop trying. They never will stop. So many heads, so many arms. So many legs. We no sooner sever one than another springs into being. Ready to fight us."

The Old Man could say that again.

With no more to think about than her safe exit from the pleasant

environs of the principality known as Ostarkia, April Dancer began her preparations for departure.

It was somewhere during that time that the turnkey down at police headquarters had occasion to go to Karwin's cell. He was a bit frightened and thoroughly upset when he saw that the squarish, loutish assassin was not stirring on the small cot that held his reclining figure. Assassins were usually cell pacers. Like caged beasts.

The turnkey's hue and cry for a doctor and help was of little avail. No amount of medical skill could have returned Karwin to life.

Like all failures in the deadly game of espionage, Karwin had somehow secreted on his person the L pill that permitted him to take his own life. L as in lethal. Potassium cyanide.

Captain Dorsett, when apprised of the calamity, cursed more fluently and passionately than ever.

The Devil take all spies everywhere!

Operation Torch

The Iron Curtain that so closely enfolds Hungary has not changed the look of the land. Mother Nature knows little of political ideology, of individual or collective oppression. Hungary is still largely a rolling fertile plain, stretching east of the Danube across the Tisza River to the border, and yielding many crops. The Danube still looks blue to new lovers. Indeed, the land of Tokay wine, bauxite, and agriculture looks little changed by the events of that historic day in 1956 when Red Army tanks swept across its borders to reinforce the puppet government and overthrow the national Freedom Fighters, and by all that has followed.

United Nations observers and committees are still barred from the country. In the port metropolis of Budapest, there is no wall as in Berlin. But there is communism, there are Communists, and there is intrigue, political chicanery, and eternal vigilance for spies.

For two agents to arrange a meeting in one of the bigger hotels in such a city was an extraordinary feat. The walls had ears, every smiling Hungarian face could mask an enemy–a traitor or Secret Police underling who might turn you in for a forint.

The Auer Hotel, a fashionable hostelry whose boldly vaulted ceilings and rococo staircases and flowered urns were a reminder of the thousand-year-old monarchy which had not yielded to republicanism until after the Second World War, proved to be the rendezvous point for April Dancer and Mark Slate. They arranged it in a simple manner that would have delighted Mr. Waverly's academic instincts.

They registered as man and wife, Eva and Bela Lukas, a business couple from Gyor, come to the big city to enjoy a holiday from Mr.

Lukas's tiresome but important duties in the machine industry. Their visas and *bona fides* were in excellent order and the mustachioed desk clerk was eminently satisfied as he banged his bell for a porter.

April was pleased to see that her British colleague had foregone his usual taste in clothes for the masquerade. Slate generally was conspicuous for his loud waistcoats and Carnaby Street clothes. But now, for the Lukas characterization, he wore a brown drab suit over his thin erect figure, and the normal unkemptness of his yellow hair was plastered in a part. The green eyes shone brightly behind rimless spectacles. For herself, April had done her dark hair in a severe bun, was wearing dull black flats and a sensible two-piece gray tweed that did little for her excellent figure. Their luggage was suitably serviceable and undistinguished. German leather with big brass buckles.

They didn't speak in the elevator, April hanging shyly onto Slate's arm for the benefit of the elevator operator–a young boy with silken shirt and simulated tuxedo jacket. Mrs. Lukas was the mousy type; she'd have to be considering the way her husband acted and dressed.

Once the door of their room had closed on the porter, Slate bolted the door and took off his spectacles. April collapsed into the arms of a faded gilt chair and stretched her legs. Slate was busy for a full five minutes, checking every nook and cranny of the suite for bugging devices. April watched him as she relaxed, enjoying the lithe movements of the tall, seemingly indolent agent whose mind and skills were indeed something to write home about. It was always very difficult to believe that the guy was a rock 'n' roll fan and played a very mean guitar. Music and mayhem were such odd bedfellows.

The thought made her chuckle.

Slate came back to her, frowning, and took a seat across from her on an ornate, stiff-backed chair.

"Funny?"

"Uh-huh."

"What is funny?"

By mutual agreement, their voices were pitched low, as an added precaution against eavesdroppers and hidden mikes.

"The Mr. and Mrs. Lukas routine. Don't let that give you any ideas, *Bay-lah*."

He winced at the neatness of her Hungarian pronunciation. But a smile twitched at his mouth.

"When I desire you, dear April, I'll let you know. Seriously, it was a sudden notion. The loving spouse and all that. Why not? Hungary loves lovers."

"You mean Paris." Sex had never been an issue between them. Since Mark Slate had come over from London to join hands with

U.N.C.L.E., he had somehow older-brothered her in the extreme. April really didn't mind, because U.N.C.L.E. came first, but Mark was a handsome rat and she knew he never exactly wanted for kicks. "Now, how about giving me a rundown on what gives?"

"You did well in Ostarkia."

"Piece of cake, in your language."

"You're so right. There is more to the cake. Much more. A lot of other pieces. Ostarkia was only the first slice."

"Go on."

"Mr. Waverly briefed me on a chore. Rather a large chore. We'll operate in tandem as usual. I'm afraid it will involve a bit of travel."

April smiled. "Back to the states?"

"Sorry. Wrong stop. Try Johannesburg."

"South Africa?"

"South Africa. And all the bloody diamonds in the world."

"Diamonds?" April echoed. "That can't be right. Karwin wasn't interested in diamonds. And THRUSH–"

"Forget THRUSH. This is not one of their operations."

"You mean someone else wants to take over the world? I wonder why. It's in such rotten shape all over."

Mark Slate extended a silver spaded cigarette case. She took one. The green of his eyes was intense now, giving off strange lights. The suite was silent; no street noises rose from below.

"Substitute TORCH for THRUSH, old girl, and you have it. T-O-R-C-H."

"I can spell. What's TORCH?"

"The Order of Reich Crusade Hierarchy."

"You're putting me on."

He shrugged. "Sorry, dearest. That's the way the flag flutters. It's our old friends again. The supermen, the *Herrenvolk* come back to plague us as never before."

"Ouch," she said. "That had that ominous sound I don't like."

"I'll do more than spell, April. I'll tell all. TORCH has come into being. An organization of suprapolitical, -military, and -civil powers. Just like Herr Hitler's. A *Fourth* Reich. Ready, willing, and able to pick up where the paperhanger left off. A new superrace of supermen and supergods, who will beat, bully, terrorize, and slaughter to get on the top rung again."

April exhaled some blue smoke. "Time. The Old man must be on to something. This isn't that new. There've been rumors since the end of the war. All the unrest in Berlin."

"Will you let me tell it, chum, before we may be rudely interrupted? We're not going to stay in Budapest that long. We fly out tonight. Mr. Lukas is going to be called back to his plant on an

emergency. Spoiling his and dear Mrs. Lukas's vacation."

"How sad for them. But go on. I'll just listen."

"Splendid. Knew you'd come through. All right, where were we?"

"You were carrying a torch."

"So I was. So it comes foully down to this. These chaps are in business, all systems operating, and we have to go down to Africa to see to it. April, this plan of theirs for world domination has to be financed. Money for weapons, technological equipment, employees, and all that lot–so, you see, they found an answer in Johannesburg. The diamond center. If they can infiltrate, engulf, and otherwise stake a claim, it's patently obvious that a monopoly of all the diamonds on the map of the world would come in quite handy, don't you think?"

"Diamonds are a torchbearer's best friend–I get it."

"The analogy is crude, but yes, positively."

"What does Mr. Waverly base all his suspicions on?"

"Several things." Slate grimaced but a cold smile of agreement accompanied the expression. "One–had Karwin killed the Crown Prince, the successor to the throne would have been Emil Kolodi, and I needn't remind you how kind the Nuremburg trials were to that ancient Nazi. So Ostarkia would have become a breeding ground for TORCH ideology. Two–there has been a steady influx of ex-deputy *fuhrers* coming to the fore in many of the remote provinces of the world. Of course, they gather frequently to discuss old times and possibly share some anecdotage about how to burn a Jew in six easy lessons, but there has to be some deeper, far more terrible reason. Three–the United States, in a spirit of let's-bury-our-dead-and-forget-the-past, has let a tremendous number of known ex-Nazis become active in German politics. We won't waste our time questioning the wisdom of that but the point remains, surely, that not all of the men and not all of the boys who were reared and fought in that Nazi Germany we once knew are *dead*. Which simply means that the seeds of this TORCH business have been in the ground for twenty years. And now, they are being harvested. If someone doesn't come along with some DDT for them, we're jolly well in for it."

For once, April could hear the sound of the RAF flyer in Mark Slate's voice. He had been too young, of course, to fly a Spitfire in the Battle of Britain but he had lived as a boy through that war. The bombings, the blitzes, Coventry. She had never known him to speak with such heat or feeling for the past.

"Steady on, Slate," she wisecracked.

"Shows, doesn't it?" He nodded. "Yes, I suppose my Union Jack is waving. But I'm not crackers yet. I just want to get cracking on this. We go to Johannesburg as an engaged couple. I'm marrying you come June, it seems, and I am a titled English lord and I wish you to have

the largest and most exquisite diamond ring that my fortune can buy. Sound good to you?"

"I'm going to miss being Mrs. Lukas, Bay-lah. She was so nice and mousy."

"You are a lovely mouse," he said gallantly, "but you are never mousy. Now what say to some lunch?"

"Goulash," April Dancer said. "Let's have some real live legitimate Hungarian goulash so we can tell all our friends when we get back to New York."

"Done."

He moved to the French phone poised on a mahogany stand between the couch and the doorway. April stood up, flexing her tired muscles. She felt the need of a cold stinging shower. She began to attack her luggage, sorting some of the special equipment and supplies as well as deciding on a change of wardrobe.

Neither she nor Mark Slate saw the six ugly dark shadows that suddenly emerged from beneath the connecting door of the next suite of rooms. The shadows were small, spidery, and infinitely loathsome. Crawling, scuttling, fanning out like some hideous silent army of destruction.

Mark Slate was telephoning, April Dancer was unpacking. The room was still, save for the tiny normal sounds each was making as they performed these operations. The six dark splotches sped across the carpeted floor as though directed by some remarkably acute inner intelligence. The concerted advance of the racing insects was grotesque and horrifying.

Slate froze when he saw them, his green eyes wide with alarm.

"April!" he blurted. "Black widows–"

The organization known as U.N.C.L.E. houses many secrets behind its innocent facade of Del Floria's Tailor Shop, which is the only entrance to the building. An amazing honeycomb of offices, steel walls, and corridors, it is a veritable network of efficiency. The private office of Mr. Alexander Waverly, which has an egress known only to the man himself, is perhaps the most unique room of all.

Mr. Waverly's sanctum sanctorum could well serve as a War Room for a nation as large as, say, Spain. There is a huge illuminated map of the world which shows the position of every U.N.C.L.E. agent at large or on assignment. A huge shortwave unit, powered by the massive system of cables and high frequency batteries on the roof of the building, is capable of sending a message to the outer limits of trackless Tibet. Numerous homing systems and devices, transistorized to the maximum range and perfection, permit Mr. Waverly to carry on a conversation with an agent as far away as the North Pole with the

same ease and dispatch that he could telephone Brooklyn. Thanks to an intricate relay system of boosters and pickups, there are no limits to the communications attainments of U.N.C.L.E.

A simple set of enamel buzzers on Waverly's polished desk places all five departments of the organization at his fingertips. From Personnel on down through Security and Enforcement, Waverly controls U.N.C.L.E. with a patient, knowing, sure hand. With so much to be done, so much to be cared for, disposed of, and attended to, he very seldom leaves his desk.

He was there now, on the afternoon of the day that Mark Slate was to contact Miss Dancer in Budapest. The fact of the matter was he was anxiously awaiting a call from them. Either one of them or both. Waverly was very fond of the people he sent on field assignments.

The office also held an enormous teletype machine, on the order of those employed by news services to keep themselves apprised of developments as they occur. This machine ran constantly, feeding a ton of information and items into the complex U.N.C.L.E. filing system where it would be assimilated, tabulated, and digested.

It was clicking now. Rhythmically, smoothly. Mr. Waverly, lean and professorial in his baggy tweeds, walked to it, his lined face set in thought. His spatulate fingers played with the curved bowl of a briar pipe.

For all the world, he might have been a pleasant English headmaster thinking about the next day's examinations for his Latin class.

No sunlight shone in this far corner of the office which overlooked the East River and the towering glass beauty of the United Nations Building.

Mr. Waverly stared down at the long wide ribbon of teletype paper spewing from the machine. The tiny busy little keys were tapping out a seemingly endless array of information:

"…Castro has uncovered another threat to his country, thanks to diligent work on the part of the Cuban Intelligence Agency. More later… Russia's 1,500 m.p.h. supersonic airliner will have a hinged nose-section which will allow pilots a clearer forward view of takeoffs and landings… New York buyers are alerted to watch for $250,000 in diamonds stolen from BOAC plane about to take off from Hong Kong for London Airport… U.S. Military can now reduce size of garrisons in Europe, thanks to huge air transports capable of speeding vast numbers of troops across the oceans…Europe is now ordering U.S. supersonic jets. BOAC and BEA is buying $300 million of our DC-8's; Pan Am has placed half-billion order for 25 Boeing 747's…Sukarno has told newspapermen: 'I'm keeping my mouth shut–in a thousand languages' "

Mr. Waverly permitted himself to smile at that. The teletype

hummed. He read on.

"…Buddhist immolationists set three more examples for L.B. Johnson today, the last personal bonfires occurring in Saigon…Vivien Leigh won the French Academy award for acting as a result of her performance in Ship of Fools. *…Former Nazi Deputy Fuhrer Max von Repp, who is serving a life sentence in Berlin's Spandau prison for war crimes, in a 33-page appeal for leniency to Russia, France, and the U.S., declared that his conviction of 1946 was illegal. Von Repp's lawyer contends that the Allied War Crimes Tribunal at Nuremburg in 1946 based its decision on statutes that did not exist when the war broke out in September 1939. It is believed by competent legal minds both here and abroad that Max von Repp will win his freedom.…In Hollywood, today…"*

The head of U.N.C.L.E. turned away from the machine in annoyance. Blast it all. THRUSH was bad enough–and now TORCH. Still working hard, still burrowing, trying anything and everything to set their infernal demigods and tyrants loose. Max von Repp, one of the very worst of a terrible lot. It had always amazed Mr. Waverly that von Repp had not swung with them. The blood of a few million unfortunates was on those SS hands of von Repp's. He had commanded the garrison in Leiderburg.

Von Repp was still a young man, as ex-Nazis went. Scarcely fifty. Perfect fodder for TORCH. The sort of cold cruel leader who could spearhead their drive for a return to Nietzsche's philosophy of world rule.

Mr. Waverly did not like the news one little bit.

Privately he fumed. As he always did. The people who worked for him never found him in a dudgeon of any sort. But alone, he could give vent to his disapprovals and dissatisfactions. He felt both now, in equal proportions.

He strode to his desk, sat down, discarded the briar pipe, and thumbed one of his many buzzers.

"Yes, Mr. Waverly?" a female voice said crisply, emanating from no particular spot in the large, superbly stylish room.

"Contact Mr. Solo and Mr. Kuryakin for me. A priority call. No delays."

"Yes, sir, as soon as possible."

Mr. Waverly relaxed a bit in his leather-cushioned chair and picked up his pipe again. He sucked on the cold stem and mused. Yes, why not?

If TORCH was on the move, perhaps it would be wise to pour on all the manpower coal that U.N.C.L.E. possessed.

Slate and Dancer were perfectly fine agents but it wouldn't do any harm to have Solo and Kuryakin backstopping them.

Their tremendous experience and personal conflicts with THRUSH

would be decided assets in this sudden new and terrible war.

The Spider People

The Black Widow.

A very poisonous body of shining dread, spreading eight long feelers into the world of nature and man. One bite and death came in a matter of minutes.

And there were six of the monsters racing across the carpet in the suite of the Hotel Auer. There was no time to think, no interval to gauge the threat. There was only room to move, to dodge. Mark Slate sprang from the telephone stand, hurtling for the wide old-fashioned bed. April took her cue from him and flung her lithe body across the floor, gaining the gaudy bedspread barely one step ahead of the scuttling black destroyers.

But still they came, pausing not a moment, fastening their tentacles on the silken bedcover. They formed an armada of black terror climbing up the sudden barrier.

Slate clawed out his weapon. A waistband pistol tucked into the beltless top of his trousers. April, caught unawares, most of her arsenal in the German luggage, fell against the heavy headboard of the bed. The dryness in her throat was characteristic. If Slate hadn't seen the spiders…

Quickly she pawed a soft pillow from under the bedspread and swung it before her. A black spider, poised on the lip of the bed as if looking for an opening, suddenly scurried forward. Behind it, another shining bulb body appeared. Then another. There was no time to lose. The bed had become a tableau of Grand Guignol.

As Slate's pistol coughed, a whisper of sound close to her ear, she smashed the pillow down on her target. The spider disappeared beneath the soft mass and she stamped her flat shoe savagely on the compress. She didn't wait to see what the results were. She kept her right heel vised on the pillow as she swung the remaining bolster into play.

Slate's gun made another splat of sound. Two instant smears of red and black viscous fluid stained the expensive bedspread. Three, April counted rapidly, three down. And three to go. She repressed a startled scream as a black widow gained the tip of one of her flat shoes and slithered toward her ankle. Her heart beat furiously but she held onto her nerve. She thumped the bolster down sharply, saw the spider shot from her shoe tip. Again, Slate was busy. The automatic silencer in his hand coughed again. Neither of them spoke or shouted or made an outcry now. The business of avoiding the black widows was a dread enterprise that scarcely allowed time for breathing.

Her colleague had now forgone target practice, no longer relying

on even such a vaulted skill as his own efficiency with weapons of all sizes and calibers.

She became aware of that as he lunged off the bed, heels compressed in a stomping movement, and came down heavily on the floor. A grunt of deep satisfaction escaped him.

April clambered across the bed, her weight sagging into the mattress. She balanced herself against Slate, shooting a quick survey around the room. There were scattered ugly splotches on the carpet. And one lone spider, tentacles writhing, stood forlornly in the center of the room.

"Five of the blighters," Slate confirmed the kills. "And there stands the last of the little ladies. Shall I do the honors?"

"Be my guest."

Slate took careful aim once more. The gun coughed. The spider dissolved in a blast of destruction.

April sat down on the end of the bed, shuddering involuntarily. Slate repositioned his gun. A wry smile wreathed his face.

"Jumping beans?" he suggested.

"Butterflies," she disagreed. "Like most females, I dislike all crawling things. And creepers. Glad you had those green eyes peeled."

He was grimly serious once more.

"Flight was in order, girl. We might even bolt. They're on to us, right enough. Of course, they could have sent a bomb or another more certified novelty. But black widows–now, there's a touch for you."

She nodded. "I counted six–" She made a rapid survey of the destruction. "And six it is. Hope there aren't any more."

"I think not. Let's seal off the cracks and slits in this room. I'll check the air conditioner too. That's always a good place to pipe in some poison gas or more of these furry little friends." He eyed her benignly. "Still want that goulash?"

She chuckled.

"I'm as hungry as a bear, Deadeye Dick. And while you're checking, that bad cough of yours needs a little refueling, doesn't it?" She indicated the area in his body where he had tucked the silencer-automatic. He chuckled too. At best, the noises he had made disposing of the spidery threat could only have been likened to someone with a very bad hacking cough.

"Right you are if you know you are," he said cheerfully.

"You could do me one favor Mark. The female in me. Please get some tissues or something and cover up all that ugliness on the floor and bed. I don't have to look at them, do I?"

"Your wish is my command."

As he stalked into the tiled bathroom, turning on the light, April was thinking at a lively clip. How could TORCH have gotten on to

them so quickly? She was sure that she had gotten out of Ostarkia as unobtrusively as possible. The plane ride in had been uneventful; no one suspicious had been on the flight. Slate had contacted her at the terminal in his Bela Lukas characterization, bussing her with appropriate husbandly warmth. There must have been some slipup at his end of the deal. She herself had made a costume change en route to the airport, which had been in keeping with what Slate had designed for them as a cover. Still, once again, she had to renew her admiration for the cool Briton's quick brain and quicker skill with guns. Thank God for the RAF and Lend-Lease. U.N.C.L.E. had benefited one hundred percent and then some the historic day that Mark Slate had brought his guitar and his green-eyed genius to Headquarters.

"Mark?"

He had come out of the bathroom, hands fluttering with tissues, humming one of his favorites. April, trained in classical ballet and therefore a devotee of good music, seldom recognized a third of the melodies that Slate played or hummed or sang. It didn't really matter though. Just another subject to have fun baiting him on.

"Yes, milady. You have a thought?"

"Let's skip the goulash and make tracks out of here. We can look Budapest over, see the sights, and catch that plane. I don't like sitting around like a pigeon for more potshotting. Either way, we'll be on the move. We can send the luggage on to the airport and check it out for explosives before we take off."

He dabbed at an eye with a bit of tissue and sighed. "You think TORCH will try again?"

"What do you think?'

"I shall be packed and ready to leave as soon as you are," he said indolently, letting the tissues flutter to the floor. The six loathsome blurs of spider bodies lay where they had died, uncovered and in plain view. Mark Slate took his cue from her, returning once more to the business of readying for a departure from the Hotel Auer.

For April Dancer that could not be soon enough.

Hotel rooms gave her claustrophobia–when she knew that the enemy lurked in their corridors.

"I have called you two gentlemen here for a specific purpose," Mr. Alexander Waverly said, pursing his lips. The briar pipe lay on the glass-topped desk.

Before him, reclining in their accustomed seats, sat his two top Enforcement agents. Napoleon Solo and Illya Kuryakin. It always amazed Mr. Waverly that two such contrasting men could work so well as a team. But then again, it proclaimed the very depth and

efficacy of U.N.C.L.E. that they could do so.

Solo, a blithe spirit who masked an innate briskness of mind and body, was ever the trim, bland-faced executive. A handsome rogue, by all counts. One could easily be deceived into thinking that he was a rich man's son enjoying the fruits of a parental legacy of millions.

Mr. Kuryakin, on the other hand, was a brooding, quite serious-faced young man who had not Solo's love of proper dress. Indeed, the straw-haired Russian was a somber enigma. No less quick and not one shade less resourceful. He was of smaller stature and as lean as, say, a Cassius, but there was a remarkable, tigerish, athletic quality about Kuryakin that belied his lean and hungry look.

Both of them now waited for Mr. Waverly to continue, knowing how their chief was wont to come to the point in his own good time.

"Both of you are familiar with this TORCH affair that has come up. I think it was you Mr. Kuryakin, who called my attention to the alarming number of disappearances of agents from all walks of our–profession."

"Yes," Illya Kuryakin said gloomily. "Three CIA agents, two Interpol, and the count is not official yet as to know how many MI-5 has lost to this new movement."

Solo nodded, his bright eyes twinkling above the peculiarly shaped identification card pinned to his left lapel.

"Sieg Heil," he murmured dryly.

Mr. Waverly clucked. "Yes. These madmen whose cry persists–'Tomorrow the world!' –well, no matter. We know they are there. We will take the necessary steps. But my thought is this: since we are aware of TORCH's plans in regard to the diamond wealth of South Africa as a means of financing their crusade, I have assigned Miss Dancer and Mr. Slate to the initial steps of the investigation."

"April should like that," Solo smiled. "All those diamonds. A field day for a woman."

"Quite." The leathery-faced head of U.N.C.L.E. stared keenly at his key operatives. "The purpose of my calling you both in. I wish to ask you–do you think the two of them can handle such an important matter as this is shaping up to be or should I send you both along after them to–ah–guide their activities?"

Napoleon Solo looked at Illya Kuryakin. The Russian shrugged. Mr. Waverly caught the gesture.

"Yes, Mr. Kuryakin?"

"It's really not my place to assay and comment on a fellow agent–but since you ask, I must tell you he's not my cup of tea. Mr. Slate is assuredly bright but his brashness I find rather pushy. If you'll permit my saying so, he is rather un-kept. He ought to cut his hair more often, and forgo those striped ties and checked coats and loud

waistcoats. He's casual about his preparations for assignments and very cavalier about his briefing. I suppose what I'm saying is that he is just not serious enough."

"And you are also saying–" Mr. Waverly prodded him, a bemused smile on his face.

"That he is courageous, brilliant, resourceful, and one of the most intelligent agents that this organization has ever been fortunate enough to land."

"Hear, hear," Napoleon Solo laughed.

"Well," Mr. Waverly grunted. "That settles Mr. Slate. And are you both of equal thinking on the subject of Miss Dancer?"

"We both love April," Illya Kuryakin said with what might be taken for gloominess.

"Indeed we do," Solo agreed. "Fact is, Mr. Waverly, dear Miss Dancer is an extraordinary agent. I think she rather proved that with her participation in the Zorki affair."

"Hmmm." Mr. Waverly pyramided his fingers. "In that case, I shall not ask you to drop whatever you are doing and set sail for Africa. But try to keep yourselves free for a special alert. We'll see how this one runs. I am glad you both feel that the TORCH situation is in proper hands."

"Lovely hands, I would say," Napoleon Solo said, his handsome grin infectious.

"Slate should cut his hair," Illya Kuryakin said, his somber smile paradoxical.

Mr. Waverly dismissed them both, pleased at the outcome of the interview. To Mr. Solo's and Mr. Kuryakin's plaudits of Miss Dancer he would have added one simple encomium.

She did not present untoward or unreasonable amounts on her expense account.

He checked the platinum watch strapped to his left wrist. It was about time he heard from Mr. Slate and Miss Dancer. They had arrived in Budapest, by his reckoning, a full two hours ago, Central Europe time.

The business of the strange disappearances of special and secret agents was highly disturbing. It was as if the very earth had swallowed them up.

And the entire perturbing succession of vanishing acts had all seemed to begin with the emergence of TORCH as an evil to be reckoned with.

Blast it. People didn't just vanish. There were corpses and remains and bones to be counted.

What had been done with them?

All That Glitters

The two people kissing in the private inner offices of the Ashley Diamond Mines, limited, had every right to do so. For one thing, the office was lavish, properly subdued with broad silken drapes that closed out the blazing Johannesburg sunlight and, for that matter, the motley populace of Europeans, Bantu, Afrikaans, and Mixed who might be strolling the concrete sidewalks. For another the oldest drive known to the civilized world had propelled them into each other's arms.

The woman pushed back, fingering the lacquered magnificence of her crowning bonnet of blond hair. Her tall, erect curved figure was stunning. Her outfit of light blue pongee with a belted middle clasped her almost as lovingly as the man had.

"Simon," she whispered huskily. "Not now.'

"I don't wait on clocks," the man growled brusquely, poorly concealing the intoxication of his senses. "Sable, you're maddening. Like diamonds. So hard on the surface yet exquisite to touch and–"

The woman laughed and moved to the desk, selected a stenographer's pad and a ball-point pen, which obviously were her tools. There was indeed something finely polished and honed about Sybil Brighton. She was tall for a woman yet not one line of her fully realized feminine figure suggested angularity.

"Sable," she said. "Your odd name for me. Sable isn't Sybil. Sable is fur and soft to touch. Diamonds are cold and unbreakable."

"Simon says," he sighed, taking up the required position on the executive side of the desk. He looked at home there. He, too, was tall. English tall, with a military swagger to his shoulders. His face was bony and quite formidable. The tan of his skin went well with a strong nose, a well-cared-for mustache, and a neat crew-cut hairline. His eyes were almost expressionless for all the warmth of his tone and manner. He waved an arm idly and sat down, as though made helpless by his passion. "I warn you, Sable. You can't keep putting me off. Think I've gone native, do you? Too much sun. Too many gin-and-tonics. I mean to keep you on as secretary but hear me out. We've come to the Day of Judgment. You're a positive source of annoyance to me. I'd as leave sack you as have to look-but-don't-touch all bloody day long."

Her hazel eyes mocked him. A slight smile curved a bow of mouth.

"You won't sack me, Simon. Can you afford to, do you think?"

He steepled his fingers and regarded her evenly above their crest.

"Threats, dear Sable?"

"Conclusions. I don't care a feather what you do with your German friends or this company. You know what I mean and who I mean. Get rid of your dear wife and then I'll come to you. The way you want me to. The way I should like to. I don't choose to become an anecdote for

your fellow coupon-clippers down at the club."

"I see. The old song."

"Yes. But the words and the music to this ditty are mine. That's the difference. I won't throw away the years of maturity and planning for a tawdry shack-up. Don't make me say it again, Simon."

He had lowered his eyes, he tan of his face taking on a deep flush of anger. Simon Ashley had also put a great deal of time on this. He had come to South Africa as a very young man, joining the booming thrust of the gold and mining industries, which had swept like a bonfire over the land that had once known only grazing cattle and sheep and an agrarian peace. But now, with this new business in the air, this glorious, fresh enterprise, and a chance to rise even higher in the scheme of things, Sybil was being a *woman*. At the most awkward of times. How would it look for a man of his reputation and character to divorce a woman in a wheelchair? A tired, faded flower who had withered at his side all these early formative years. The Ashley Diamond Mines, Limited, could not afford such a scandal. Not now, when plans were so important. When the facade of integrity and trust mean so much. Damn Sybil! Why couldn't she settle for an affair? It would all be so pleasant, so simple. Damn himself for hot blood at the dangerous age of forty-one.

He cleared his throat, helpless in his conflict. He dedicated himself to the present imperatives. He pulled rank on the woman he had allowed to become more than his personal secretary.

"Go back to your desk, Miss Brighton. That will be all for now."

Sybil Brighton stiffened. A faint smile froze on her regal, regular features. Her slender fingers tightened on the pad and pen.

"Very well, Mr. Ashley."

"See to that Heathcote claim on the Number Forty property. Can't have these nuisances piling up. The Board meets on Friday and it's the very first thing they'll want accounted for."

She nodded, turned on her heel, and strode from the office. The door slammed faintly. Simon Ashley fingered his moustache, his eyes holding a moment of private grief. Then the expression was gone and he swiveled in his chair and reached for the lower drawer of the desk. He unhooked a private telephone that bore no number on its dial plate and put in a call. As he waited for an answer, his finger continued to follow the pattern of his elegant moustache.

A nasal, almost irritated voice grated in his ear. Simon Ashley winced.

"Ja"

"Ashley here. Kurt, I have been indiscreet."

"So?"

"We will have to rid ourselves of a possible danger. I could vouch

for the lady but I daren't risk it. You understand?"

A short burst of German expletives greeted the information. Ashley waited, controlling his own nerves. Let the squarehead bleat. He was still calling the shots from this end of things.

"There's no need to call down the gods, old man. It simply must be done. The usual business. As I say, I could hold out on this but the game isn't worth the candle. Calm yourself. She's no one of any consequence and will not be missed."

His listener muttered but said: "As you wish. Who is this party?"

"Sybil, Kurt. My secretary."

"You want her dead, Herr Ashley?"

"Yes." Simon Ashley pronounced, knowing full well how the executioner was enjoying his confession. "I want her dead. Do it quickly, please."

"You are sure she knows nothing? She has not written anything on paper, made tapes, or learned any of your affairs? It is important that there are no loose ends, *versteh*'?"

There was a light malignant chuckle from his hearer.

"*Ja ja*, Herr Ashley. I will kill for you and ask no more questions. It is the new order of things. A push-button war, *hein*?"

"Don't lecture me, thank you."

"I see you later. Goodbye."

The phone clicked and went dead. Ashley replaced the instrument in the lower drawer. It was done. Just like that. He was surprised that his palms were not sweating. Damn bloody South Africa. And gold. And diamonds. And all this infernal heat. A man had trouble thinking in such a climate. Like Maugham's *Rain* and all those Englishman's yarns he had read at Eton in the good old days.

He felt desperately like a gin and tonic, though. That would settle him. But first he walked to the draped windows and drew the pull cord. The curtains rustled sibilantly. Sibilantly…Sybil…Sable…for one terrifying moment he felt like rushing to the drawer phone, ringing Kurt back, and calling the whole thing off. It was too awful–sending her to her grave without ever knowing once what she was like in bed. He had dreamed of that often.

The glaring Johannesburg sun flooded the room, washing over his proper respectable office and its proper respectable furnishings. A large oil portrait of the Queen stared royally down from the opposite wall. Next to it the paneled wood appeared like a grille of artistic design.

Simon Ashley pulled himself together and poured himself a stiff gin and tonic from the tiny bar set in a wall niche behind his desk. Well, Sybil Brighton wouldn't be the first to fall. Not by a long shot. But that was the trouble with wars and programs and new ideas. So

many corpses by the wayside.

His thoughts roved. Mutton. He hoped Ethel hadn't had the cook prepare the usual Wednesday-night fare at the sloping, verandahed villa on the outskirts of the city. He was decidedly not in the mood for mutton.

He wanted raw, red, bloody meat.

The scent of the bullring rose in his nostrils.

For a man whose ruptured eardrum had kept him out of active service in the days of Hitler's War, it was a stimulating feeling.

The nerve ends and mind corners that had never known an actual physical blood-letting or the angry terrible feel of violence were now poised for action.

He feverishly windowed the picture of Sybil Brighton's murder. How would Kurt destroy her?

A bullet? A knife? A poison pellet? Or would he close those awesome fingers of his around the soft silky throat until the eyes bulged and the tongue protruded?…

Sybil Brighton looked up from the recesses of her desk in the outer offices of The Ashley Diamond Mines, Limited, and raised her penciled eyebrows with appropriate deference. Two newcomers were standing before her desk, wearing that peculiar air of this-is-so-dreadfully-new-to-us. The tourist look. The first expression of someone who has come to look over the lay of the land.

"Yes, may I help you?"

There was no mistaking the Savile Row look of the gentleman nor the Yankee smartness and striking good looks of the woman. Together they formed a most attractive couple.

"Ah," the gentleman said, a curious languor in his tone, which went so well with the cut of his coat, his polished shoes, and his expensive cravat. The face, placid and handsome, smiled. "Then you do speak English. Excellent. My Afrikaans is very limited and one cannot always be sure. Though I must confess you are the picture of the gentlewoman.

Sybil found herself pleased and delighted, despite her bad time with Simon.

"Seen too many natives on the streets, have you? I don't wonder. For all of its civilization, Johannesburg is still quite a Kipling sort of place."

"We have recently arrived from London," the man said. "I am Peter Ferrongo D'Arcy. This is my fiancee, Jean Astaire. We are rather interested in discussing diamonds with the people who know them well. Your Mr. Ashley was highly recommended to me by the British consul."

“I see.” Sybil’s calculating eyes roved over the face and the figure of the woman. She approved of the careful brown hair worn so smoothly in a tidy upsweep. Too, the lady was gracefully attired in a beige dress, a button-down front with a roll collar, which did wonders for her shapely shoulders and hips. “Yes, Mr. Ashley knows as much about diamonds as anyone in South Africa, I would wager.” She reached for the button on her intercom box. “May I inquire what precisely you had in mind? I’ll ring him, of course–”

The woman spoke for the first time. A bright, pleasant voice.

“My fault, really. You see, Peter and I are getting married in June. He’s spoiling me. He insisted that he would buy me a diamond engagement ring that would outshine the Koh-i-noor. Isn’t that just like a rich spoiled young man?”

“I envy you,” Sybil said. “And you wish Mr. Ashley to suggest a reputable dealer and, say–something that might be special?”

Peter Ferrongo D’Arcy smiled and bowed.

“You see, Jean? As I told you. Englishwomen have a knack for divining a man’s intentions. Something you American women have yet to learn, for all your emancipation. Be glad I rescued you from that sordid musical chorus.”

Sybil Brighton laughed along with them. Of course. Lucky young lady to have landed such an obviously rich catch. They looked so in love, too. She held back a sigh as she announced them to Simon Ashley on the intercom.

“You may go right in. Mr. Ashley will be delighted to help you, if he can.”

“Come, my girl,” the gentleman said, taking his lovely companion’s arm. “Now we may see the real thing. Thank you, miss.”

“Peter, you’re such a dear.”

“Just beyond the corridor there,” Sybil Brighton said. “You can’t miss the door.”

They didn’t.

It was the only one in a carpeted foyer that held a white metal table bearing a statue of Cecil Rhodes, the founder of much of what is called English Africa.

“We’re doing fine,” the Savile Row specimen muttered. “Simon Ashley can be a big help to us.”

“Yes,” April Dancer murmured. “And if I see something I really like, I just might let you buy it for me.”

Mark Slate frowned, took the doorknob in his hand, and turned it, ushering her into Simon Ashley’s office.

The tall diamond-agency head rose from his polished desk to greet them, a fixed smile on his face.

“Mr. D’Arcy. Miss Astaire. How very pleasant.”

He extended his hand across the polished desk top. The fixed smile on his tanned face was a triumph of willpower and conditioned reflex.

In the flashing instant that his expressionless eyes had settled on the faces of the visitors, he had recognized them. Yes, there was no mistake. The TORCH mug file, which contained the photos and likenesses of thousands of agents the world over, was quite a tribute to Nazi thoroughness.

He didn't remember their names but the faces of April Dancer and Mark Slate had an acute definition that was quite memorable.

Simon Ashley had spotted them as agents for the organization known as U.N.C.L.E.

Death in the Diamonds

There was a box of imported Havana cigars on Simon Ashley's desk. Mark Slate demurred with a polite wave. April Dancer seated herself in a comfortable chair that combined the bamboo of Africa with the wood of England. Her eyes roamed about the office, as any woman's might who was seeing something for the first time. Simon Ashley noted the cameo brooch dangling from a thin golden chain at her throat, unaware that it was a miniature camera which was taking pictures every time April turned her head.

"Well, now." Ashley's smile broke a trifle. "Recently arrived from London, have you?"

"Yes," Slate suppressed a yawn. "I'm devilishly interested in buying this wench a trinket for our engagement. An exquisite something. A nonpareil, rather, so that she may walk into the Savoy or anywhere in the world for that matter without encountering another lady wearing the same thing."

"I see. Then you aren't really keen on just commercial diamonds. Say a precious stone with a good history."

Slate shrugged with that gesture that betokens little consideration for the cost of anything.

"Failing that, is it possible to have a ring made to order?"

Simon Ashley chuckled, casting his eyes at April.

"How nice for you, Miss Astaire. A fiance who can order the moon and the stars to your specifications." His gaze leveled at Mark Slate. "It is well that you came to me, Mr. D'Arcy. Johannesburg is full of pirates and cutthroats. No different than any other competitive market. The prices tend to go sky-high for tourists, you know. Your own diamond mine, of course, is purely a day-in, day-out venture, producing some millions in diamonds yearly. I think I can put you on to something you'll be keen on."

"Splendid. The consul said you were both efficient and trustworthy, Mr. Ashley."

“Oh. Nice to hear that. In view of the fact that we are not the sole agency in Johannesburg, I’m flattered.”

“We ran down a list,” Slate conceded drily. “The Edgeworth people. The Allenbine. Carmondy, Smithers and all the rest of them, including some Dutch and Afrikaans combines. But lo, Ashley Diamond mines, Limited, led all the rest.”

April stirred in her chair.

“It’s all so fascinating, Mr. Ashley. I mean–getting diamonds out of the earth and all that. I know so little about it.”

He favored her with another of his polite, meaningless smiles. His eyes held back his private amusement at the game these two were playing. Oddly, he felt no fear. He was experiencing the vast and tremendous excitement that association with the TORCH movement had instilled in him. These would be but two more for the tender mercies of his friend Kurt.

“Most people are in the dark about diamonds, Miss Astaire. They like to think that they spring from the earth, whole and sparkling. Not so. It’s rather like finding a dirty lump of coal. Then one must scrape, polish, and refine. And then, of course, there is the testy, careful business of the world market. Import, export.” He waved his hands, knowing he was making double-talk but certain that Slate would allow him to bypass the details. “But now as to your ring. I know one or two dealers in town I would highly recommend. Their product is not only authentic but the work is exquisite. Finest in the world, I should say. If you want, I’ll arrange an introduction.

His hand fluttered to the intercom box.

“No, no, Mr. Ashley. We place ourselves in your hands. I hold you to our common origin. As one Englishman to another, I should consider it a great favor if you would lead the way in the entire matter. I am not without influence. Which would accrue to your great advantage in the future. Some of my friends will be coming to Johannesburg shortly. I’d be delighted to recommend you highly. Understood?”

Simon Ashley chuckled.

“How can I refuse in the face of that? Tell you what. You mentioned the Allenbine Company just a moment ago. Let me run you out there this very night. Say around eight. One of those dealers lives just off their property, though he doesn’t work for them. I assure you that you will feast your eyes on diamonds and precious stones such as you have never seen before. Are you both free this evening? I’ll drop everything else.”

Mark Slate and April Dancer exchanged looks. April permitted her eyes to glow with anticipation, her cheeks to show her inner delight. “Oh, Peter. Please say yes.”

"Have I ever dared refuse you anything?" He puckered his lips, blowing a kiss across the room. "You see, Mr. Ashley? In short order, I will be balled and chained like any married man."

"From here," Ashley said gallantly, "it would seem a most pleasant form of captivity."

"You English–" April managed a blush. "Thank you, Mr. Ashley."

He bowed, though he was still sitting.

"Now, where are you staying in town?"

"The Red Garnet," Slate laughed. "Rather a sedate hotel considering the exotic title."

"A fine hotel, really. One of the most well appointed. Good. Then I'll send my car around for you."

"Eightish?"

"If that is convenient." Ashley had risen from his chair and come around the desk. He walked forward, extending his manicured fingers. The fixed smile seemed riveted to his face. "Will you be staying in Johannesburg long?"

"Only as long as it takes to bejewel my future wife properly. I'm due back in London on the ninth. Rather an important conference. We're deciding on a real-estate venture in the Chelsea district."

"Quite." Simon Ashley bowed formally to April and clenched Mark Slate's hand in a rather firm grip. "Well, I am pleased to have met you both. If I can be of service, that will be even more rewarding. Till tonight then."

"Goodbye, Mr. Ashley," April said, getting a close-up of the tanned, moustached head of the Ashley Diamond Mines, Limited, agency. The cameo camera, for all its miniscule size, was capable of taking fifty pictures from the *same* negative. A new, highly advanced step forward in the art of reproducing film. And another feather in the cap of the U.N.C.L.E. Lab Department.

"One thing more, Mr. Ashley." Slate had paused at the doorway. "I do so hope you won't misunderstand but our purchase must be something I can insure with Lloyd's of London without filling out a lot of bothersome forms."

"Of course. All aboveboard, Mr. D'Arcy."

With that, the interview was concluded on a satisfactory note. As his visitors left, Simon Ashley returned to his desk, reaching once more for the drawer phone.

He was sweating now, suddenly realizing that his nerves were a bit raspy. He had forgotten to offer his guests a drink. A bad slip that. Something no English gentleman and businessman would ever do. But at the very least, he had not been fooled. That was something to give thanks for.

He had to wait for the line to ring some seven times before he got

through.

"*Ja*?" came the familiar wary question.

"Ashley here. There's been another development. No, don't interrupt. This is urgent. Two U.N.C.L.E. agents have just left my office. They will have to be eliminated. A thought occurred to me."

"Thoughts, Herr Ashley? That's good."

"Yes. Listen carefully. I've invited them out to the Allenbine property. On a ruse–equally as poor as the one they offered me. But they'll go. They can't afford not to. It strikes me that I can bring along the woman I spoke to you about. A nice foursome. But I choose to return to the city alone."

The grating chuckle that came from Kurt's end of the line was admiring and raucous.

"You are learning. *Wunderbar*! Yes, this is wise."

"I thought it would appeal to you."

"The time?"

"We should reach the property about nine o'clock. No later than that. It's quite dark up there even when there's a full moon, you know. And, of course, the pits are quite close. But I leave that to you."

"*Himmel*, but you have turned bloodthirsty in short order, Herr Ashley."

"I have you to thank for that, don't I, Kurt?"

"*Auf Wiedersehen*," Kurt growled and hung up.

Simon Ashley reburied the phone and thumbed the intercom box, asking Miss Brighton to come in. She did.

She stood before the desk, remote and cool. He could see that she had promised herself to remain unapproachable and businesslike until he changed his mind.

"Sable," he said ardently, not moving from the desk. "I'll talk to my wife tomorrow. I promise you that.'

She didn't flinch, waiting for him to go on. But he could see he had scored a hit. Her hazel eyes had flickered. "I love you, Sable. And there's the end of it. You'll see. I'll get the bloody divorce, I'll marry you–"

She crumpled, wilted, coming around the desk, rushing into his arms. "Oh, Simon…"

"There. There. It will work. You'll see."

He kissed her, reveling in the lush warmth of her lips, basking in her feverish embrace. There were tears on her eyelids.

"Sable, will you dine with me tonight? These people just in. I promised them the town and I suggested a foursome. Safety in numbers, old girl. All quite respectable."

She took his pocket handkerchief, dabbing at her eyes. Her firm figure vibrated with happiness as she squirmed on his lap. "Darling,

I'd love to. Especially when you're like this about things. They seemed so very nice–"

"Yes," Ashley agreed with quiet relish. "They did seem that, didn't they?"

They had found a taxi waiting on the sidewalk outside the Ashley Diamond mines office. A squared black hopeless vehicle that must have been designed in '33. Slate handed April into the leathery interior and gave the native driver the address of the Red Garnet Hotel.

Johannesburg was bright, hot, and sticky. The sidewalks, jammed with people, surged with activity. False palm frond lined the walks, gaudy in the sunlight. The taxi crawled to the intersection where a uniformed officer, in pith-helmet and short pants, blew a whistle shrilly.

April adjusted her cameo so that it would not take any more pictures. At least, not unnecessary ones.

"Think he tumbled to us, Mark?"

"Hard to say. Type-casting right enough. Did you see those bows and hear that 'quite'? But he was bothered by us. Bothered awfully."

"What makes you say that?"

"He offered cigars but no drinks. And there was a bar in plain view by the windows. Something was on his mind."

"Oh, that."

He frowned at her. "And what is the significance of that remark?"

"The stunning blonde secretary. Didn't you see the traces of lipstick on Mr. Ashley's mouth? I did. Those two are playing footsie and we both knew that jolly Simon is a married man."

"What does that have to do with what we think he might be?"

April patted the tidy upsweep of her hair; heat was devitalizing it. "I don't know. I did get a lot of pictures and we have seen several diamond agencies in this town and it strikes me that Simon Ashley would make a perfect front for the people we are trying to land. Besides, there's all those reports. Some five agents have dropped out of sight in being sent to Johannesburg, and you and I both know that the Allenbine property is a deserted, abandoned mine. So when he asked us to go there, you agreed. Seems close enough to what we're after."

"Perhaps. At any rate, when we get back to the hotel, we'll call Father and give him the news. Just to be on the safe side. Or else two more agents will be missing. We'll watch Ashley."

"You think there's any chance he can call the consul or check out Peter Ferrongo D'Arcy and Jean Astaire?"

"We're covered well enough," Slate said. "Visas and passports in order. There is a Peter Ferrongo D'Arcy, you know. He is currently in

Alaska looking over some fisheries. No, I would say that Mr. Ashley may just be testing us and we won't know until tonight whether he's a rat or a nice English bloke making the course of young love run true and smooth."

"I smell a rat."

"Me too. In any case, we have to be the bait. Feel cheesy?"

She laughed, letting a bold breeze through the car window wash over her face. It felt refreshing. But there was always a dark cloud even on the brightest, most sunlit day.

If TORCH *was* blazing in Johannesburg, there would be a hot time in the old town tonight.

Blaze of Doom

There was no lichen or moss on the high, vaulted walls of the cavern. The polished stone surfaces shone with the brightness of glass, enhanced by the flaming sconces and flambeaux set at vantage points around the meeting place. There were no tables or chairs of any kind for the fifty or more persons standing as a crowd might before a raised level of rock that served as a dais of natural design.

The hushed, silent group of people were all staring toward the lifted platform. Uniformity of purpose lay like a shroud over the faces of the audience. There was something fixed and expressionless in those faces, those figures. A concentration of every fiber of their beings, directed toward the solitary figure poised like a menacing hawk on the raised dais.

The audience was mixed, a smattering of feminine faces shining almost paradoxically from the group. Yet the people gathered in the immense cavern somewhere beneath the surface of the earth had many things in common.

They all wore uniforms, the brown togs and emblems of the *Sturmabteilung*. Gaudy army belts and buttons and peaked caps from another day and era. Any Jew old enough to remember would have recognized the dread costume of Hitler's terrifying Storm Troopers. The awesome Brownshirts who had begun the very first brutal enforcements of the *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei*. The Nazi party. But this was not the past; this was the awful present. The cavern's walls were hung with bright flags. The red banners with the black swastikas in a white circle–and they had been woven and sewn as recently as six months ago in South America, prepared for their contraband voyage here to South Africa.

The new and growing army of the Fourth Reich waited, eyes on the figure before them. The hawk of a man, like the Nazi eagle, really, as he stood, arms akimbo, legs straddled in black shining boots, leveled his eyes down at them. He stood as Adolf Hitler had once

stood, pausing in the midst of an exhortation, to summon more of the powerful words and psychological tools that would drive this hidden underground army to its new horizons.

Each man and woman in that organized claque of listeners waited. Unmoving, unflinching.

The hawk–or the eagle–was about to speak again.

Everything in the cavern was new. The uniforms glistened, the boots shone, the artificially treated walls of the place sparkled like diamonds on cushioned mounts. It was as if the room had sprung whole and intact from some disordered logic of the mental processes. It was a tableau wrested from some madman's distorted fancies. Yet it was happening. Happening on the very day that April Dancer and Mark Slate returned to their hotel rooms at the Red Garnet to report in to Mr. Waverly and make plans for the evening rendezvous with Simon Ashley of the Ashley Diamond Mines, Limited.

The man on the platform was not tall. Rather, he was short and somehow bullish. Yet he represented the hawk and the eagle in the way his shoulders shifted and his arms poked and fluttered and jerked as he spoke. His face, seeming emblazoned by the flames in two tall sconces positioned on either side of him, was the most unforgettable thing about him. It was a face that had been born in fire or reincarnated from Hell.

Somewhere in the dark past he had been hideously and cruelly burned. The ravages and ruins of his nose, mouth, and hairless eye sockets were mute testimony of some incredible escape from death. But the flames had touched him, had swept across his countenance, leaving only a livid, puckered mask in which holes that were his mouth, nose, and eyes were dark spots in a red face.

He was talking now, in a high-pitched shrill voice. The stridency of a Hitler. His words were German. Hoarse gutturals charged with a restless tempo of excitement and promise. April Dancer would have understood him had she been there to hear him. But her fluency in so many languages would have nonetheless caused her to doubt her translation.

It would have all seemed so staged, so hoked up, so planned. A veritable duplication of the mob hysteria patterns created by the master of that technique. But it was none the less impressive for all of its mimicry of the once highly workable and formidable design. Hadn't Hitler once led a nation into thinking it could rule the world simply by making that people first dare to think that they could? And it had succeeded too. The business of pushing millions of Germans toward the fallacious doctrines of a superrace.

"…we are on the move at last. Rejoice with me, your leader. For coming over the horizon of our wildest dreams, I see the dawn of our

success. Then indeed, we will, the Fourth Reich, like the phoenix rising from the ashes, rise above our enemies and once more occupy the place that was taken away from us by the weaknesses of many of our colleagues. The duplicities of many of our trusted comrades. Yes, I tell you! Yes! The Nazi movement will sweep across the civilized world. And we, the bearers and guardians of TORCH, will be in the vanguard of that great new day…"

His listeners stirred, recognizing his pause, venting their acclaim and enthusiasm in a thundering ovation of "*Seig Heils*!" Fifty arms and more, thrust forward in the rigid, awesome Nazi salute. The uniformed man on the platform smiled. His hairless skull gleamed like marble.

"…we move well here," he continued, the piping voice lowering, yet not losing one register of power. "With diamonds we will succeed. And then the gold of this empire called South Africa. It is all we will need to launch our enterprise. The keel has been laid. There are sympathizers and champions from all walks of life. All nationalities, all creeds, all philosophies–who have seen the error of their judgments and ways, and will come to our side. Already many of our ex-comrades, made to suffer for the glory of the Third Reich, will rejoin us. Oh, I tell you–this is but the beginning of *der Tag*. The day! Our day! And I, your *Fuhrer,* say to you that tomorrow's mankind is but today's torchbearer."

The cavern went wild. Hoarse shouts and cries of hysterical delight resounded against the walls. The new *Fuhrer* extended his arms sharply, cutting off the bedlam. His audience subsided but murmurs of their sentiment seemed to linger in the polished walls.

The flame-withered face raised toward the vaulted ceiling

"Enough! It is enough that we are of one mind. But again, I must say to you–caution must be our watchword until we can boldly spring into the open. We must be continuously on guard. Thus far we have been successful but I enjoin you with all my heart and being to remember. Your first allegiance is to TORCH and the destruction of all and any who would expose us. Security is all–or we shall be doomed to failure before we can set foot in the streets. There will be no parades, no marches, until the hour of our triumph has come." The head lowered and the black eye pits roved over the faces of the massed audience.

"Now return to your normal activities. Be discreet, remember the watchword–*caution*. And above all, go forth and work for the new *Vaterland*."

There was no holding them now. The cavern thundered with approval and heartfelt hysteria. The man with the flame-scarred face nodded and turned away.

The cheers echoed in his ears as he left the platform, disappearing through a cunningly concealed door behind him that seemed but a part of the cavern's natural design.

Now the crowd stilled and began to file from the immense amphitheater. They moved out quickly, finding the narrow passageway that led back to the beehive of cells that housed their civilian clothing, wearing apparel, and hosts of disguises that allowed them to move about in Johannesburg, South Africa, without alarming the populace.

A cleverly constructed elevator tube would rush them up to the core of the abandoned mine property that served as many things for the local inhabitants. It was everything from a picnic ground in the daytime to a lover's lane after sundown.

They would leave the area in groups of twos and threes, some in cars, some riding bicycles. A handful had arrived in Lambrettas and the assorted scooters that were so commonplace in the wide expanses of the countryside. The abandoned mine was set down in a running ridge of low hillocks of ground.

There would be nothing suspicious about that.

The country was a drug for tourists and sightseers.

And anarchists.

The sign that still stood upright at the fork of road which joined the improved highway still bore its painted title defiantly, as though business were going on as usual, though in point of truth, the mine itself had been closed down for more than three years.

THE ALLENBINE MINING COMPANY, the sign said.

The face that fire had destroyed was happy, if one could read an expression on such a sight. The new *Fuhrer* was sitting behind a simple cane table somewhere in the recesses of the earth beyond the vaulted cavern. It was a bare, cheerless room. Utilitarian and little else, save for an ultramodern, highly technological shortwave radio set looming from a wall niche to the left of the table. There were no pictures, flags, or pleasurable items in evidence anywhere in the room. A simple fact that always made Kurt, Simon Ashley's executioner, wonder why the new *Fuhrer* had chosen such dismal quarters for himself. Surely a great leader should surround himself with pomp and luxury.

Kurt stood before the cane table, standing at attention. For a man with a rasping, nasal voice, he was the direct antithesis of the sound. Kurt was large, almost Santa Claus-like, with sweaty folds of fat and a red nose set between bright, snapping eyes and a wide, generous mouth. He wore no uniform; his clothes were white ducks with a Panama hat that he now held in one stubby hand.

The man with the destiny of TORCH in his hand stared up at the plump specimen of a jolly burgomaster realized to the teeth. That was

when Kurt thought that the new *Fuhrer* smiled.

"Your report, Kurt." The voice was no longer strident. Now it was deeply masculine and powerful. A whisper that was a roar compared to the piping shrillness of the platform only a short while ago.

"*Bitte*," Kurt wheezed.

"Ah, you have something to add to your report."

"Yes, leader."

"Very well. Go on."

"Herr Ashley has found two more spies. He also asked me only this morning to eliminate his secretary."

"The fool and his woman. I wondered when he would bring himself to that decision. Good, I am glad he is not squeamish. A good man, Kurt. Very valuable. Two agents, you say?"

"Yes, Leader. He identified them as U.N.C.L.E. people."

Suddenly the man at the table made a fist, balled and angry. The withered face looked troubled.

"*Verdammter Kerl*–they make a mistake if they think they can dismiss us easily. At ease Kurt. You are sweating."

"*Danke Schon*." The large man relaxed, assuming an easy manner by twirling his panama though he was far from feeling easy. There was never any telling what the new *Fuhrer* would say or do next.

The coal pits of eyes shifted.

"Did Ashley outline a plan?"

Kurt described briefly the plans of luring the agents out to the abandoned property. He would take care of it himself, but if the *Fuhrer* had any suggestions or was rescinding the order, he was thoroughly amenable. Kurt did very little thinking for himself. He was all too aware of what happened to underlings who exceeded their authority.

"Three more for the pits. So be it. If we have to climb to victory over the skeletons of misguided spies and do-gooders, what matters the total? I would kill a thousand of them–no, a million–before I would see them sink our hopes." He leaned back in his cane chair and surveyed the uneasy giant before him.

"How many is it now, Kurt?"

"Bitte?"

"You fool–how many agents and prowlers have you eliminated so far?"

Kurt tried to remember. It was an effort. But he knew he had to have some kind of answer so he hazarded a guess.

"Some twenty-three, Leader. In the beginning, it was Interpol, then the CIA, but certainly most of them were MI-5 people. Now, of course, we have these recruits from U.N.C.L.E."

His superior slapped the table with delight. "Recruits? Ah, Kurt,

most amusing. A tactful and witty way to put it. You are a comical man, dear Kurt."

Kurt trembled and said nothing.

"I chose you well. My executioner. Even as a lad at Belsen, you could hardly wait to massacre your share of Jews. Oh, the report on you was estimable. How old are you now, Kurt?"

"Forty-one, Leader."

"And how did you escape the hangman's knot at Nuremburg?"

"I–lost myself in a work gang–disappeared into Poland–and–well–here I am. I am faithful, Leader. I obey you in all things."

"Oh, but you do. I don't question your loyalty. I simply pass the time wondering what the Israelis would like to do to you should they ever find you. Perhaps you wouldn't be so lucky as Eichmann. They might shoot you on the spot. You are high on their list of wanted war criminals, Kurt. You rank very high. Did you know that?"

"*Jawohl*, Herr Leader."

The new *Fuhrer* settled back in his chair.

"You may go now, Kurt. Do as Herr Ashley suggests. But please do not forget the credentials and personal effects of these people as you did the last time. A regrettable oversight, Kurt. You must always know the identity of the people you kill. Else you will not recognize their relatives when they come looking for you, *nicht wahr*?"

"I understand, Leader."

"Then get out now. Do your duty to your *Fuhrer* and to TORCH."

"Heil, *Fuhrer*!"

The Nazi salute rendered with bountiful gratitude, Kurt hauled his large body out of the narrow cheerless room with alacrity. His superior stared at the closing door, shaking his head.

It never changed.

Even when building a holy of holies, an empire of the gods, the tools sometimes had to be placed in the hands of pigs and swine like Kurt Ritzler. Regardless of the ideologies, there was always the stench of the crematoriums about the fat pig.

The new *Fuhrer* had always hated the feel and scent of flames. The smoking, scorching, burning fury of a fire that left nothing but charred ashes, ruined embers, dull ashen destruction.

He would much rather think of diamonds. Cool, clear, hard and shining, diamonds.

The *coldness* and magnificence of the gods.

Make Mine Mau Mau

"Eightish" comes late in Johannesburg. To April Dancer and Mark Slate, waiting in the flower potted patio of the Red Garnet Hotel for the time designated by Simon Ashley for their assignation seemed

interminable. The tropical sun had blazed mightily all afternoon long, blistering the concrete and asphalt sidewalks so that one thought they might swell and erupt at any second. Even the air-conditioned private rooms they had registered in as separate, respectable entities, had done little to relieve the scorching inferno of heat that reduced all the world to a fine white-hot spectacle which dazzled the eyes.

April spent over an hour in a tepid tub, switching over to a stingingly cold shower to revive her faltering coordination. The tropics did slow you down, just as they said it did. The changeover from the temperate climate of Ostarkia and Hungary was too rapid to be so quickly assimilated. Mark Slate, busy with code messages and communications to Headquarters in New York, left her pretty much to her own devices until seven o'clock. U.N.C.L.E. agents were supposed to make good use of their time. He was equally certain that April had attended to her own arsenal of supplies for that night's test venture with the head of Ashley Diamond Mines Limited.

He phoned her room and after the necessary string of "Jeans" and "darlings" for the benefit of eavesdroppers suggested her meeting him in the Red Garnet's cocktail lounge for a drink.

She was prompt, as usual, showing up in a neat blue dress of summer cotton, properly bedecked and bejeweled with a cameo, charm bracelet of silver links, and an eye-arresting headband of beautiful matching pearls. Slate grinned from the comfort of a corner booth, signaling her. April was carrying only a small patent leather purse but, as he well knew, she was a walking army of destruction. God bless U.N.C.L.E. and all those tools. For himself, he was armed with .38 caliber pistol, explosives, and cutting tools–but April–why, she could blow up one-half of Johannesburg if he was any judge.

"What are you having?" she said briskly, joining him in the booth. "Gin and bitters, don't you know. Best thing for this heat."

"Be a dear and order me one too." She looked around the lounge, liking the pale blue hues of the wallpaper and the sturdy ivory tusks and Darkest Africa motif of the decor. There was a handful of very English-looking people at the bar, talking cheerily. Walrus moustaches and pencil moustaches and briskly brushed hair. One solitary woman in evening clothes, dressed to the nines, sat remote and almost lifeless at one of the circular mahogany tables set away from the long bar. "A nice place," April ventured. "Even to be stood up in."

Slate ignored that. "Do you have everything, dear?"

"Everything."

"Check. Father sends you his best."

"How is the old dear?"

"Busy. Nothing new in the business. Same old reports filtering in. Coca-Cola is up three points, the Mets are losing one game after the

other, and dear old Max von Repp is about to be sprung from his cage in Spandau Prison.

She frowned at that. “Looks as if the old man was right. There could be something going on.”

Slate winced into his drink, waiting while a tall, quiet, dark waiter placed a gin and bitters before April and drifted away, clasping his serving tray as though it was a depressed to hat.

“It gets decidedly better. Father says that some dozens of agents have disappeared in this vicinity. Not a trace. We are to keep our eyes open and not get careless.”

“Now he tells us.” She sipped her drink. “Mmmm. Good.”

“Thought you’d like it. If you’re a good girl I’ll buy you another to save that penurious Maine spirit of yours. I know how you hate spending money. We have time.”

April smiled. Mark was sleekly handsome in his white tuxedo jacket, matching cummerbund, and white canvas shoes. His normally Beatle mop of hair was tidily parted, rendering him most presentable indeed.

“Peter, darling,” she said throatily, leaning toward him, her eyes mischievously passionate.

“Don’t overdo it, Jean. Jean Astaire. How corny can you get? Why didn’t you make it Gene Kelly and let it go at that?”

“I thought it was a cute touch.”

“Dangerous you mean. There might be a lot of moviegoers in this neck of the woods.”

Slate didn’t say more. His green eyes lifted. A big, fattish man who might have doubled for Santa Claus except for the fact he was wearing a chauffer’s peaked cap, was threading his way toward them squeezing his bulk between the tables. A wide smile split the jolly face.

“Ashley’s driver, I’ll wager.”

April turned in her seat. The fat giant was bowing in the aisle way.

“Excuse me, please. You are Mr. D’Arcy and Miss Astaire?”

“We are indeed,” Slate said mildly.

“I am Mr. Ashley’s man. I have the car outside. He asks your pardon but he will have to meet you at the property. If that is satisfactory to you.”

“Oh, quite. Well, Jean–we are to get a tour of Johannesburg at least. Is it very far, driver?”

The man smiled. “Perhaps thirty minutes. You will like the scenery. Quite beautiful, really.”

Slate and April rose, and hand in hand, followed the huge chauffer out of the Red Garnet bar. No one paid any attention to them save for a cursory glance.

On the sidewalk before the hotel, a long dark open touring car stood ready. The fat chauffer held the rear door open for his employer's guests and then scrambled behind the wheel. Mark Slate and April Dancer settled back against the comfortable leather cushions. Sundown lay like a filter of gold over the city. The bright glare of afternoon had yielded to the mercies of oncoming dusk.

"Off you go, my man," Slate waved grandly, in keeping with his characterization of Peter Ferrongo D'Arcy. April laughed throatily, as she suspected any fiancee of such a charming rich young man might. The driver nodded to himself, shifted the heavy vehicle into gear, and edged away from the curb. The doorman of the Red Garnet, an African in braid and velvet, waved a dark hand in friendly farewell.

April and Mark Slate had never set eyes on Kurt Ritzler before in their lives. Or in their careers as U.N.C.L.E. agents.

"This stinks," Mark whispered out of the corner of his mouth, as the large car poked its way into mainstream traffic heading south of the city. Fiats, MG's, and a random Cadillac whizzed by.

"Hear, hear," April said. "I think we're being taken for a ride."

"We shall see what we shall see," he answered grimly. "At any rate we can always say we saw Johannesburg before we died."

"This isn't the way to the Red Garnet," Sybil Brighton said in a puzzled voice. "One would think you were heading out of town."

"Sorry, old girl," Simon Ashley chuckled with good spirits. "Didn't I tell you? We're meeting D'Arcy and his fiancee at one of the merchant's houses."

"Oh." She snuggled against him, the bucket seats of his tiny smoothly running Aston-Martin rendering such a position desirable but not very comfortable. Ashley brushed his lips against her smooth forehead, experiencing that curious sense of affection that the sadistic slaughterer has for his victim.

Sybil had never looked lovelier. The golden bonnet of her hair, framed against a transparent cowl of silk, was radiant; she looked like a queen. He sighed, shifting gears for the long gradual hill that climbed up beyond the outskirts of the city. The setting sun had dropped behind the range of hills that bordered the extensive properties to the south.

Ashley's heart was beating rapidly. The closeness of the kill had set up bonfires in his brain. If only he could have Sybil before he turned her over to Kurt. If only…

"Love me truly, Simon?"

"Truly."

"Will she divorce you, do you think?"

"Ethel? She must. I won't have it any other way," he said grandly.

“Oh, Simon. You sound so sure and strong. I love to hear you talk that way. Rather than as you address your German friends–must you deal with them at all? They’re so–” She hesitated, not because she didn’t know the right word but because she didn’t want to offend him. He sensed that.

“What the deuce do you mean?” Out of his head flew all thoughts of even a kiss before she died.

“You know what I mean,” she sighed. “Don’t let’s quarrel. Not tonight. I’m so looking forward to the engaged couple.”

“No,” he said doggedly, eyes on the road, holding the wheel as if it were a matter of life and death. “Out with it, Sable. Let’s clear the air.”

“I don’t like them,” she said quickly and icily. “They’re so dreadful. So–*Nazi*. There. It’s the only word I can think of. Why must you tolerate them in your club and your social life? What possible bond can you have in common with them?”

“It’s not so easy as all that.” He relaxed. “They’re diamond people, are they not? Millionaires. They’re good for business. What else can I say? Shall I shut out fortunes because their owners don’t have Downing Street ideals?”

“Oh, Simon. I’ve made you angry.” She huddled against him, resting her cheek on his arm. If he had any last minute changes of heart about his plans for her, they had died aborning. Had she been able to see the expression in his eyes as they rested on the road ahead, she would have been frightened. She had finally signed her own death warrant.

The gravel road narrowed, thinning from the main highway and assuming an exceedingly spectacular course. It swerved and dipped sharply, tall trees shadowing one side, bluffs sheering down on the other. Sybil Brighton frowned.

“You *are* angry with me, aren’t you Simon?” Her hazel eyes tried to make some geographical sense out of the route they were traveling. But they couldn’t. She knew the farming and grazing country had fallen to the rear rapidly. Now the horizon boasted only those long, lowlying ridges of hills and all the flat open country that had become a veritable graveyard of abandoned mines and discarded profit makers. Kimberly lay beyond that range of hills. Kimberly and the long ago.

To make matters more ominous, the sun had left the land. Night shadows and gathering stretches of darkness were fast closing over them. She checked the landscape ahead. Simon hadn’t even turned on his lights.

“Simon,” she urged him.

“I’m not angry. Merely thinking.”

“About what?”

“You, and how much I’d like to make love to you.”

That brightened her a bit. She laughed, feeling a tide of lurking passion rise in her own bosom.

“You’re such a fool. Can’t you wait?”

He had said what he had not so much from desire as from a wish to get her thinking about other things beside his German friends. The remarks made him uncomfortable.

“I’ve waited a long time, Sable. You know that. With his right hand, he squeezed the silken knee close to his own. “Blast you, but you’re a maddening female at times.”

“Well,” she said with sudden warmth and surprising candor, “there isn’t any time now. Not with meeting D’Arcy and his fiancee. But I promise you, my dear, when we take our leave of them tonight, I will come to you the way you want me to.”

He couldn’t speak. The car raced ahead from the sudden weight of his foot on the accelerator.

“Did you hear me, Simon? I want you. Tonight.”

“Yes,” he said thickly, his brain rioting with visions of her, his very own Sable, coming to heel at last. The dream of another kind that had warmed his days and nights in a way that was different from but as exhilarating as the major dream. The dream of TORCH and what it would mean to him.

She stared straight ahead, her hazel eyes cool and calculating. When a woman makes up her mind, there is no changing it. Especially in the matter of sex. For all his naivete about the feminine mystique, Simon Ashley knew that much for a fact.

“God, Sable,” he said hoarsely. “You’ve taken away my power to think–”

Which wasn’t all she had done.

She had postponed the matter of her own death for at least another twenty-four hours.

Simon Ashley kissed her swiftly, his thoughts reeling, wondering exactly what to do about his suggestions to Kurt Ritzler.

There wasn’t that much time left. Within fifteen minutes, they would have reached the southeastern tip of the Allenbine Mining Company property where the executioners lay in wait.

The dark touring car turned in at the fork of the road. April saw the clapboard sign, very clearly visible in the headlights. The fat driver had scarcely uttered a word during the whole of the half-hour drive.

The car suddenly braked to a violent halt. April felt herself flung forward against the backrest of the front seat. The driver turned, a pleasant smile of apology on his round jolly face. Mark Slate, recovering his balance, scowled.

They were apparently parked in the middle of nowhere. There was nothing but the range of hills, the wide expanse of open brush country, and a few scattered clapboard shacks visible some fifty yards ahead of the touring car. A nighthawk screeched in a nearby tree.

"See here," Slate began. "Where the devil is your Mr. Ashley?"

"He is coming. Soon, now. But first, we must wait."

It was only then that both Mark Slate and April Dancer saw the long dark nose of the Luger thrusting over the front seat, held in the hands of the Santa-Claus driver.

The man's eyes seemed to shine in the gloom.

"You will not wait long, *meine Kinder*. Perhaps five minutes. That is exactly how much time you have left to live."

Down Went April Dancer

"Five minutes," Mark Slate said mildly. "That hardly seems sufficient. What do you say to that, darling?"

"I think he's joking," April laughed. "This is some kind of entertainment Mr. Ashley has arranged–"

"Silence!" Kurt roared, his face no longer jolly. The Luger nose jerked. "Place your hands on your head. *Schnell*!"

They did as they were told. It was obvious that their fat chauffer was no longer deceived about their identity, if he ever had been at all. Kurt's face was ugly, and deadly, in the dim light of the car. The moon overhead gave a gray glow to the sleek plumpness of the man. The Luger shone like a diamond.

"What now, old sport?"

Slate asked.

"We wait. And then, you U.N.C.L.E.'s will be sorry you ever came to Johannesburg."

"Don't bet on that, chum."

"Peter, don't rile the man. Can't you see he doesn't like to be riled?"

"Sorry, old girl. Well, what are you waiting for?"

Kurt's beady eyes roved between them, not sure what they were talking about, not certain as to exactly what to do next. But April, thanks to her own suspicions, had been ready for some treachery from the vicinity of the front seat. With her hands placed on her head, in the standard Continental holdup posture, she had found what she sought: the pearl studded headband in her hair. One lone pearl came

out, easily hidden by the clasp of her fingers. Kurt muttered in his throat, the Luger trained steadily, but his eyes searching the surrounding landscape. He seemed to see something he had been waiting for.

"*Ja*" He laughed suddenly. "They come. It is good. Your five minutes have ended–"

He never did see the pearl as it fell easily from April's hand and landed noiselessly somewhere on the seat where he sat. As a further distraction, April had begun to whistle. Slate's cue. The melodious piping was so abrupt and senseless that Kurt Ritzler was startled. Almost admiringly so.

"*Ach*, but you are brave–"

He got no further.

There was a whirlwind burst of light and sound. A puff of explosion and a swift budding cloud of smoke–and obscurity. He only had time to roar in surprise and alarm.

Slate reached forward, tugging the Luger from his fingers and batting the nose out of line with their bodies. April, from her side of the car, drove her flattened palm into the side of his neck. None of which was really necessary. The gas worked instantly–on unsuspecting victims. Rapidly, they climbed out of the rear of the car as Kurt toppled senseless against the wheel. The small but amazing puff and ball of smoke had almost cleared.

Slate let out his breath gratefully.

"One of these days you're going to reach for the wrong pearl. How can you tell the explosives from the harmless gases?"

"Surfaces, you idiot. The explosives are smooth, the gases are encased in corrugated balls. Easy. But forget that. This German Santa spotted something coming–"

"And there they are," Slate said drily. "Too bad you aren't wearing sneakers. I feel like running."

The flipness of his tone was characteristic. April wasn't fooled. Quickly she glanced in the direction he had indicated with a toss of his head. The stillness that surrounded the car parked somewhere in the environs of the Allenbine Mining Company was somehow awesome and disquieting. Even more so now that the nighthawks had stopped their shrilling and the moon had emerged from behind a cloud. The area was now bathed in a full clear light. There was enough illumination to see precisely what was in store for them.

It was not pleasant.

From the vicinity of the clapboard shacks, with the limitless wastes of abandoned ground serving as a backdrop, three men had emerged, like the moon, apparently from nowhere.

Men.

They were anachronisms of time and place.

The moon shone brightly on their black faces and dark oily bodies. The simple white of the tight-fitting three-quarter length trousers and short-sleeved shirts was pleasantly simple and innocuous. But that could not be said for the vicious, formidable machetes poking from their fists. The faces of the men were impassive and bland, as if they were zombies. They said nothing, fanning out in a wedge of assault, moving lightly and easily on unshod feet. Small whispering, pattering noises accompanied their advance. They ran almost soundlessly. A dark cordon of the night, shortening the distance between them and their objective with stunning swiftness.

"*Mau Mau*," Slate said in a tight voice. "Rather far south for the blighters."

"Ashley's quite a boy," April agreed, opening her patent leather purse. "I'll take the man on the left, you take the right, and then we'll settle the middle guy."

"Good show."

It was preposterous, really. The Mau Maus were outmatched, whether they knew it or not. Running targets, while April and Slate had the advantage of automatic weapons and the protective coverage of the automobile.

That in itself should have put them on their guard. But events have a way of happening so quickly at times that even the most skilled and trained of agents can be deceived.

Slate had his specially built gun already out and April had produced her own compact palm gun that was no larger than a cigarette lighter but extremely effective in close-in fighting.

"We ought to take at least one prisoner," Slate said idly, leveling his weapon. The three running men were only twenty yards away now. Still they came, widening the angle of their approach. The machetes gleamed in the moonlight. The dark bodies surged forward, crouching, the cutting weapons held before their black faces, arms ready for a strike.

"Okay," April snapped. "The man in the middle."

It was at that exact instant, with both factions ready to open up activities, that the imponderable occurred. The one improbable factor that neither of the two from U.N.C.L.E. could have foreseen.

Behind them, the trunk of the open touring car had quietly lifted. From the interior a figure alighted. A squat, bullet-headed man who seen in broad daylight might have provoked some amusement. But there was nothing funny about the black boots, jodhpurs, brown shirt, and peaked cap. Nor would you have chuckled at the wicked-looking Schmeisser hand machine gun cradled in his muscular fingers.

Had he decided to start firing as soon as he had April and Slate

lined up in his sights, they wouldn't have had a chance. But he made the prime mistake of calling for a surrender because he didn't know exactly what had happened to his superior, Kurt Ritzler.

"Drop your guns!" he barked. His voice broke harshly and impressively in the weird silence that encompassed the running approach of the three Mau Mau attackers.

Mark Slate whirled.

Many years ago on the English moors, he had confounded and dumbfounded his hunting colleagues with his wing shooting, as accurate as it was baffling. No man, they had opined during a round of bitter in the Blue Duck Inn much later, could have gotten off a shot so fast when he had literally stepped on a pheasant who suddenly had taken wing in fright, off into the gray mists over the moors like a bat out of Belfast. But Slate had brought the bird down, fairly firing from low port. A fantastic shot.

Slate had gotten his bird.

He also got the man with the Schmeisser. The gun in his hand, barely coughing, firing from the level of his hip, sent a killing round into the chest of the uniformed little man. The Schmeisser erupted reflexively as the dead fingers came down on the trigger. The squat man collapsed without a sound, disappearing into a knee-high patch of weeds just before him.

His sudden materialization had cost April and Slate the advantage they had held over the three advancing Mau Maus. Now, with sudden concert and fierce terrorizing animal cries, they surged forward, machetes flashing.

To add to the confusion, the sudden screech of a nighthawk distracted April for an instant. She dodged to one side, fighting to keep from hitting Slate. In one second, all the clarity and niceness of the situation had changed. Instead of easy-to-see targets, the tableau was now a blur of bodies and mad movement. Two of the white-clad killers had engulfed Slate and one now closed in on the woman.

The machete swiped at her, and the palm gun, small target though it was, was nevertheless plucked from her fingers. The tip of the blade had slashed it from her hand as nicely as you might cut the head off of a random daisy in the field.

The Mau Mau now laughed. White eyes bulging in a faces dark as pitchblende, April feinted, arms out flung, but this man, who had obviously slaughtered more than his share of people in one lifetime, had little consideration for her as a woman. Contempt glowed in the black face. He lunged forward, the machete poised for a downward slice of destruction.

April stepped back–and fell down.

A low embankment of earth, not easily perceived in this light,

tripped her. She sprawled backwards, legs flying upward, arms flailing to catch herself. The Mau Mau lunged again, coming down on her, machete pointed before him. She rolled wildly, like a carpet coming open. A fierce grunt and a curse exploded from her attacker. She staggered erect and jammed her fingers into his eyes. He cried out but did not drop the machete. April scrambled away from him. Briefly she wondered where her purse had gotten to. But there was no time for that. The Mau Mau had regained his feet and was backing her off again, swishing the machete in wide arcs to keep her on the defensive. She heard Mark Slate's gun cough again. That and a succession of meaty, thucking noises that sounded like a Pier Six brawl. Someone cried out in pain. The dark shadow of the open car with Kurt Ritzler still slumped forward over the wheel stood mutely in the moonlight.

The machete flashed again and once more she had to backtrack, unable to see where see was going. The Mau Mau, grinning like a monkey now, seemed far too happy about everything. That bothered her. She was unable to get her hands on any of the cutting tools or any of the weapons distributed about her body. She didn't even have time to try for another of the cultured pearls in her tiara. The man kept crowding her, forcing her back. It was like a game of cat and mouse and there was no mistaking who the mouse was.

The dark outline of the touring car grew smaller. The mass of bodies marking the place where Slate had his hands full seemed to recede into the background.

April, unable to take the offensive because of the machete, kept retreating. The Mau Mau now had all the patience in the universe. He continued to leer insanely, the machete cutting swaths in the air before him.

For one giggling, impossible second, she wondered if the man had suddenly gotten a weird romantic notion about her. She supposed she might make a tempting morsel for a man who lived like an animal in the jungle. And yet–

Her heels were digging back into the earth as she retreated before the machete. The earth was dry and hard with only an occasional patch of briar and weeds snarling her steps. She had to be careful. She didn't want to stumble again.

Then, too late, she saw his real game.

Too clearly, then, she understood.

When she did, there wasn't anything she could have done to save herself. It didn't happen quickly. It just happened. Now you see it, now you don't.

The earth gave way behind her. There was no terra firma, no floor for her heels. She was buying nothing from empty air. She had to repress a shriek of fear and wonder as the face of the man before her,

dark skin and white machete, suddenly vanished as quickly as if he had been jerked from the face of the earth. It was magic. A vanishing act of extraordinary speed.

It was only then that she realized she had stepped into a hole. No, not a hole. A pit. A mine shaft–and she could hear the Mau Mau roar with laughter–as she fell into the corner he had been working her toward all the time.

Air and space funneled up to meet her. Cold, clawing air. Her body shot downward, unimpeded, dark walls closing all around her. It was like an enormous inkwell of blackness.

And she was falling, falling…

Right into Hell.

"Simon?"

"Yes, sweet."

"Do you–think less of me—now that we've–"

Simon Ashley laughed in the darkness of Room Seven of the nice quiet hostelry just beyond the lighted thoroughfares of the city. It had all been worth it, after all. Sybil had truly been Sable. All that he had wildly dreamed about. Diamonds, indeed. Fur, indeed. The woman had been a veritable pagan, for all that ice water look of hers. He had to laugh at the distorted image of English women. Who was it that had said they were frigid and difficult to warm over?

"Darling, you're magnificent," he murmured dreamily, playing with those loose tresses of her blonde hair. Her long sleek abundant body was curled against his own. He could hear her heart beating.

"I'm glad," she said. "I did so want you to like it."

"Sable." He kissed her warmly, feeling her tremble. "You're shaking. If I've done anything you–"

"Lord, no." She laughed. "I was just wondering why on earth the engaged couple didn't show for the meeting you arranged. That was odd, wasn't it?"

Simon Ashley was noble about that.

"I wonder if they aren't doing exactly what we're doing now. Who wants to bother with stuffy mining companies when the night can be spent more pleasantly?"

"Still it was rude. After you offered your help and all. I do hope nothing happened to them."

"Nonsense. He'll probably ring me in the morning. Don't bother your head about Peter Ferrongo D'Arcy. Spoiled millionaires are like that. They're quite accustomed to breaking the rules of conduct."

"I suppose you're right, darling."

"Of course I am."

She snuggled drowsily in the circle of his arms, all passion spent

but security and comfort making her feel marvelous. Ashley's lips brushed her smooth cheek.

"What say, Sable–shall we–?"

She laughed lightly, happily.

"Yes, you dear fool. A thousand times yes…"

Simon Ashley closed over her hungrily. After all, if he had been fool enough to risk all for this dry goods, he might as well make the most of it.

Curiously exciting business, this.

Making love to a woman you were going to have killed the very next day. Still, even as he reached for Sybil Brighton, he couldn't help but wonder how Kurt had managed with the two U.N.C.L.E. agents.

If he knew the burly executioner, and he was sure that he did as well as any man, it must have been a connoisseur's dream.

The new *Fuhrer*–he shuddered at the memory of that fiery, shriveled face–demanded nothing but experts in all the fields and endeavors of the new movement. Kurt certainly was a proficient killer. And the new *Fuhrer*–there stood a leader.

Dismissing all such thoughts from his heated mind, Simon Ashley returned slightly belatedly, to the charms of Sybil Brighton.

A Nephew of U.N.C.L.E.

It was Thursday in New York. Roughly four o'clock and bitterly damp as Mr. Alexander Waverly placed a call to Section One in the Headquarters complex of the U.N.C.L.E. organization. The odd business in Johannesburg had kept Mr. Waverly busy at his desk. A steady stream of reports, messages, and assorted data had come in from all points of the compass. Despite his assurances from Mr. Solo and Mr. Kuryakin, the head of U.N.C.L.E. was readying another arrow from the voluminous quiver of his manpower.

"Send Mr. Kovac to me, please."

"Yes, sir."

It was Thursday and four o'clock, which meant that Randy Kovac, U.N.C.L.E.'s very first on-the-job-trainee, was in the building. Serving as messenger boy, map-room attendant, and chief cook and bottle washer as he learned the ropes, Randy Kovac had been Mr. Waverly's own idea. An experiment, as it were. After all, operating at full capacity in the present and with a wary eye on the future, where were the new Solos, Kuryakins, and Slates going to come from?

Randy Kovac was part of the answer.

Mr. Waverly settled back in his curved chair to wait for him. A slight smile played on his leathery face. Young Kovac was an experimental trainee, delegated to work in Communications Control only on Thursdays and Fridays between the hours of four and six, but

in some remarkably fey manner, the lad seemed to find his way into every nonsecret department of the agency. Oh, there was a touch of espionage about Kovac, no doubt about it, which perhaps made him ideal fodder for U.N.C.L.E.

When he breezed into Mr. Waverly's office (and that was the only way the head of U.N.C.L.E. would have described the young man's entrance), the eager smile on Mr. Kovac's face was symptomatic of all his bursting enthusiasm and alertness.

"Yes, Mr. Waverly?"

"Have a seat, Mr. Kovac."

Randy Kovac sat down but Mr. Waverly was sure the chair was not made that could contain him for long.

"And how are things going, Mr. Kovac?"

The boy smiled. "Pretty good, sir. But I do kind of hanker for something a little more exciting than watching a light on a board go beep-beep and wink on and off."

"Hmmm." Waverly steepled his hands, smiling wryly. "Keen for a bit of roughhouse, eh? I suppose it's only natural at your tender age."

"Eighteen isn't that young, sir," Kovac said almost defiantly. "And I graduate soon enough from High."

If one were to project the average American high school senior's idea of himself, Mr. Waverly was certain you'd have a picture of Randy Kovac. A picture, he would have added, that would probably coincide with the average high school girl's ideal high school boy. Young Kovac was tall, coltish, ingenuous in appearance, with a wholesome regular face and a mop of tidy brown hair. He was also generously endowed with common sense and personality. He seemed to observe, digest, and absorb all things both great and small, ready to throw a tremendous amount of youthful intelligence and energy into all phases of his trainee work at Headquarters. Mr. Waverly was thoroughly pleased with him.

"Be patient Mr. Kovac. Your day will come. The world never seems to run out of threats or the need for a special type of people to combat them."

"Yes, sir. Like Napoleon and–I mean Mr. Solo and Mr. Kuryakin." Randy Kovac's grin was wide and admiring.

Mr. Waverly smiled. "And Mr. Slate, of course."

"Cool, sir. Real cool." Kovac's voice bubbled with hero worship now. "If I could ever handle weapons and codes the way he does, I'd consider myself a success."

"And Miss Dancer–how does she strike you?"

The boy blushed. He didn't have to answer. Mr. Waverly brushed the need of a reply away with the wave of a hand.

"I recognize your zeal, Mr. Kovac. Fact is, I've been waiting for the

right opportunity to get you out of the mail room and into something a bit more to your taste."

"Yes, sir." Randy Kovac almost whooped the words.

"You may or may not know that Mr. Slate and Miss Dancer are off to South Africa–"

"You mean this Nazi business? Say, I was wondering about that, sir. All those items we've been getting about released war criminals and that mess in Ostarkia, why–" He paused, his blush deepening. "Sorry. I sort of kept up on the communications. I knew April was–I mean Miss Dancer–was on assignment."

"Naturally," Mr. Waverly said, without smiling. No use to encourage the boy with official approval but it was as he suspected. The young devil kept his eyes and ears open and missed very little that went on about headquarters. Thank the Lord he was on the side of the angels. "You are Irish on your mother's side, I note from your file. I also note that you seemed blessed with serendipity."

"Serendipity, sir?"

"Yes. You know what that means, don't you?"

Kovac sighed. "Yes, I do."

"Good. Then we understand each other. I feel that you may be valuable in some phase of this operation. With Mr. Slate and Miss Dancer far away, these next forty-eight hours may be indispensably urgent to us and to them. Therefore, I should like to have you on hand from now until Saturday, at least."

Randy Kovac's eyes opened wide. Brown, Mr. Waverly saw. He had brown eyes. Warm, earnest brown eyes.

"You mean–"

"Yes. Cut classes tomorrow. I'm sure you can develop a convenient excuse for your teachers. I'm equally sure that one day won't affect your grades. Well?"

The young man stiffened with what amounted to a fierce pride. The brown eyes glowed.

"I'm your man, Mr. Waverly."

"Good. I seem to recall that you enjoy a rather strange and rewarding rapport with Miss Dancer and Mr. Slate. The Long Island affair wasn't it? Some simple Boy Scout trick and a sound placement device, wasn't it? You got them out of a tight spot that time, as I recall. You overstepped our authority but the breach of rules was less important than the lives of two fine agents. Therefore, I want you to be liaison between our people in South Africa and myself."

"Yes, sir!"

"Your duties will be to remain in the area of the sending and receiving sets, taking over all the regular shifts, and report to me on anything that requires study, examination, and action. I shall be on

hand, of course, but there are other matters involving Headquarters apart from this Johannesburg affair. You understand?"

The colt in the chair was straining at the leash now. Mr. Waverly recognized all the symptoms. Tightening of the hands, tall body ready to spring, the eyes almost snapping. "I'll establish a priority rating for you, Mr. Kovac. Should you need me, you will be put through to me immediately."

"Should I place a call now just to set up communication with Mr. Slate and Miss dancer?"

"No, I think not. Wait until they contact you. Remember one thing. These long distance messages are not the place for the ball scores. Understood?"

"Understood, Mr. Waverly."

"Splendid. Now off with you. Make your preparations for a long stay at the set. This Johannesburg situation is extremely acute and dangerous. Be prepared for anything."

Randy Kovac controlled himself and rose from the chair. Mr. Waverly stared at him. Yes, Kovac would surely do. An agent for the future if ever there was one. Rough edges, of course, but experience and maturity would see to those.

Before the boy left the office, Mr. Waverly had one last enjoinder for him. Another necessary requisite of conduct for an agent.

"Above all, be brief, Mr. Kovac. In all your communications and actions."

"Yes, sir. Sighted Sub, Sank Same."

The boy waved before he left the office, a wholly natural effusion that had Mr. Waverly smiling gently.

The smile faded when he returned to the stacked folder of reports on his desk. The flow of data and facts had once again been endless and unhappy in nature. Such chaos and confusion in the world. He sighed, reached for a dead pipe from his drawer, a Sherlock Holmes model, and sucked on it thoughtfully.

Come to think of it, there had been no messages from Mr. Slate or Miss Dancer since seven o'clock, South Africa time.

There came a hurried knock on the door of the small cheerless room buried in the vast underground of the complex that housed the immense amphitheater–the one that had echoed with the thunderous acclaim of the rabid fanatics of the new movement.

"Come in," the fire-ravaged man behind the plain white cane table said. No longer was he attired in his leader's fine garments of boots, brown shirt, and breeches. He turned away from the shortwave set cramming the niche in the wall. The door opened and Kurt Ritzler fairly scurried in. For all his size, he was rabbit like in his movements.

"*Bitte*, Leader–"

"Catch your breath," the new *Fuhrer* said coldly, the voice the strong resonant one that his followers never heard. "You have been running which means something is wrong. I do not like it when things go wrong, Kurt. You must know that. So you will tell me calmly and quietly what has happened. Then I will decide how big a fool you are and what must be done with you."

In his anxiety, Kurt Ritzler had failed to deliver the Nazi salute. He was wheezing hard, his fat face shining with sweat. The *Fuhrer* was clearly aware of the dishevelment of his white ducks and chauffer's peaked cap.

Kurt caught his breath, swallowed, and spoke with great care. Calmly and evenly as his leader demanded. Though it was an effort for him not to blurt his unhappiness.

"We have been betrayed, Leader. Herr Ashley did not appear with his secretary as he said he would. This, after we had made arrangements for me to pick up the two agents in his car."

"Go on."

"I drove them out to the property as planned. They got the better of me. A gas pellet of sorts. I was unconscious at the wheel of the car for more than an hour–"

He paused, breathing deeply. The sweat on his face had beaded and glistened now.

"More, Kurt. There must be more."

"I found Auerbacken dead on the ground. He had been shot through the heart. He had stowed away in the trunk. A cautionary trick but I don't know what happened to the three Africans who were to meet me at the spot. It is as if the earth had swallowed them up. In fact–"

"You didn't find the U.N.C.L.E. people, either," the leader said icily. "Is that what you are saying, you fool?"

"There was no sign of anyone, Leader," Kurt wailed, almost in terror. "I do not know what could have happened. Unless the *verdammter* Mau Mau dragged the agents off for one of their bloodthirsty rituals. You know how difficult they can be at times–"

"You employed them," the leader said.

"Yes, because they are useful as pack rats and beasts of burden. But when the fever is on them they can revert to what they want to be. I shall have to send a message to their camp to see if what I think is so. If it worked out as I have said, there is no real harm, is there, Leader? They will be dead and–"

"Shut up." The leader's voice cracked like a whip.

The fat executioner trembled, rigid at attention now.

"Fool. Fat fool. Even now they may be roving about at will,

studying the ground, finding this cavern. Locating your precious Death House. Why do you take the path of least resistance? Why do you *imagine* that the Mau Mau have them when it may very well be the other side of the coin? It may be they who have the Mau Maus. You infernal swine, didn't you look in all the places before you came here?"

"No, Leader."

"Then look!" Then make your report. I warn you, Kurt. If this blunder of yours endangers us in any way, you will die in a way that will even exceed your own excesses of the past."

Kurt tried to rally.

"Herr Ashley–why did he fail to come–?"

"I will attend to that gentleman. Now, get out. And don't return unless you have success to report. I will not condone another failure."

"Ja, mein Fuhrer."

The fat man fairly rushed from the room.

The man with the withered face frowned a frownless frown. It would have been difficult to assess the expression of that ruined countenance. For a moment, he drummed with his right hand on top of the white cane desk.

A short oath erupted from his throat. It sounded ugly in the quiet of the room. Angrily the hawk-eagle swerved in his chair and faced the shortwave sending set. He reached up, adjusted the knobs and dials, and placed a set of earphones over his weird skull. The gash of his mouth moved as a humming noise grew in volume and then cleared with sudden sharp frequency modulation.

"This is *der Fuhrer*," he said slowly into the mouthpiece of the shortwave set. "I wish a bomb to be placed in the Headquarters of U.N.C.L.E. U.N.C.L.E. This must be done immediately. Repeat. You will place a bomb in U.N.C.L.E. Headquarters…"

The little room with the artificially shining walls, sound-proofed, and in point of fact, a veritable fortress of steel made to resemble stone, took the grim message and muffled the words so that there was no echo traveling about the confines.

When he was done, the new *Fuhrer* unhooked the headset from his ears and stood up. He had not been wearing his uniform when Kurt interrupted him.

He could now be seen to be attired in boxer shorts, a T-shirt, and soft brown sandals.

Had anyone been present it would have been clearly apparent that the dreadful fire of the past had touched not only his face.

Slaughter Alley

April Dancer felt like a bag of dirty laundry. A bag that had been cast into a shaft to hurtle mercilessly on its way to the bottom.

As she fell, normal instincts and reflexes cried out to do something. Her arms windmilled, her legs scissored acrobatically. But it was useless. She touched nothing but empty air, feeling her falling body gather the added weight of momentum. She did the only thing possible under the circumstances. She forced her muscles and tendons to relax, go limp. Hendryx, the physical training officer at the U.N.C.L.E. Academy where she had won her spurs, had once told her that an object that offers little resistance is less likely to smash on contact. Destructive force, as in the arts of judo, jujitsu and karate, turns on itself.

Of course, if you fall, say, a hundred feet, none of the rules need apply. You will probably break your neck whether you're relaxed or not.

She did not fall that far.

Unable to see, the walls of the shaft as dark as night, she very suddenly came down hard. A jarring thump and she spilled in a welter of arms and legs, end over end. Now she was rolling like a stone. With her body aching from the impact, she felt herself following a diagonal course of movement, tumbling down a chute of some kind. Exactly like that bag of laundry. The sensation was frightening. The pearl band still on her head gave her a bad few moments. With every other pearl an explosive, one direct hit against the earth or wall and she would be blown to kingdom come.

Quite abruptly she braked to a full halt.

She lay where she was, straining for clarity, fighting off the normal instinct of alarm. He body, muscles pulled and beaten, throbbed with fresh pain. Agony raced up her left side, stitching her rib cage in flashing patterns. She had wrenched that side badly. She shook her head slightly, easily, waiting for her senses to restore themselves. There was a heart-stopping silence all about her. And a strange mustiness –and an awful stench of death and decay.

In a silly feminine flash, she was conscious that she had lost one of her shoes. She lay panting, feeling soft, yet hard earth beneath her. Now the smells and the peculiar atmosphere hit here full tilt. The dominant odor was that of a charnel house.

Uneasy doubts assailed her but she followed the rigid rules of trained conduct. It was a sure cure for hysteria. She checked all of her limbs and faculties. No breakage, just that badly pulled side. She hadn't smashed anything–yet. She rose to her feet slowly, trying to pierce the gloom.

It wasn't as dark as it should have been. Her flying guess had been that the Mau Mau had foxed her into an abandoned mine shaft but the

short fall and subsequent right angle ride down a chute had changed her mind about that. It must be something else. Both shaft and chute had been just large enough to accommodate her hurtling body. Not anything else. There was no machinery or elevator or equipment to suggest that the tunnel-like affair had been used for anything else. And now, of course, there was that deadly smell. With her five senses fully returned, the stench was overpowering.

She had lost her handbag with most of its accessories. But the absence of pitch blackness in this grim interior was more puzzling than the worry about her own safety. It was dark and she was trapped in this smelly pit of a place and she had to get out. But she had to see where she was if she ever hoped to get out.

Her neat blue summer dress that Mark Slate had admired was in ruins. Great rents had split the skirt. The bosom was awry. But she had retained the headband and the ornamental charm bracelet. Grimly she unfastened the third charm from the left of the clasp. A clown's body in miniature. It was also a highly sensitive flashlight that could throw a pencil beam of light a full ten feet away.

Breathing through her nose despite the terrible odor, April flicked the flashlight on by depressing the clown's head. Her ears strained for some sound, anything that might pinpoint the advance of trouble or a source of escape. There was nothing but absolute silence. The particular quiet of tombs, graveyards, and all places of death.

The light sliced into the gloom unwaveringly and April Dancer recoiled, catching her breath. Her heart bumped violently. For all her skill and training, she was not prepared for the objects that the sliver of light revealed.

Corpses littered the area in which she stood. Had she continued on she would have stumbled over them. A thought that made her want to scream.

It wasn't that she was not used to death. But there is a vast difference between individual corpses or those laid out neatly and reverently and human flesh desecrated as she now saw it.

There were seven bodies scattered about the base of the wall her light had steadied on. Badly decomposed bodies, still wearing the now grotesque clothes they had worn before death touched them. A half-eaten face, part skull and part human being, seemed to leer up at her from the shadowed brim of a battered felt fedora. April moved the flashlight. Most of the bodies had already decomposed completely, bleached skeletons poking bony hands and feet from jackets and trousers. The garments themselves were moldy and ready to fall apart if a breeze so much as passed them. She saw one dress. A blue print now fanned mutely across a small skeletal figure.

April held herself in control, thinking rapidly.

She compelled herself to move closer to the mute piles of horror. The area in which she stood was a wide, high-arched cavern of sorts, rather like the anteroom of a fancy nightclub in New York. But there was no door. No way out. Not unless she could climb the sloping chute and navigate the sheer sides of the shaft she had fallen through.

The gloom was caused by the very little bit of light that came down from the aperture of the chute, funneled along by the air shaft. On a moonlight night, there would be gloom down here. No moon and it would be like the inside of a bottle of black ink.

The flashlight roved over the corpses. She recognized a suit made in London, thanks to the label stitched inside the jacket. There was a Paris marker on the hat band of the fedora topping the half eaten corpse. The woman's print dress appeared to be of American make but one couldn't be sure. As overpoweringly vile as the stench of decay was, she forced herself to do the job. There was no need to check the pockets of any of the clothes. She was sure TORCH would be thorough about that. She had found out what she had wanted to know, anyway.

She stepped back from the revolting cluster of the dead and stood near the chute's mouth, staring into the blackness of the maw.

This was it then.

The burial ground of all those agents who had been sent to see what they could see about TORCH. A veritable hidden graveyard of lost operatives. The CIA, MI-5, Interpol. And now, unless she got right out, the tomb of an agent from U.N.C.L.E.

Some of the corpses had been here for months, perhaps as long as a year. She could easily see what had been done. Each agent had been killed, shot, stabbed, or the like, and then cast into this black pit to rot away. Other corpses had followed, one by one. Who would look here? Who could guess? And then one day the ground above would be bulldozed over and the secret would be buried for eternity. She calculated she was some fifty feet, figuring the fall and the ride down the chute, below the surface of the earth. It was obvious now that the Allenbine Mining Company marked some sort of headquarters complex for TORCH. It was equally obvious that Mr. Simon Ashley was involved in the insidious operation right up to his Etonian armpits. Damn him.

She could only wonder briefly how Mark Slate had made out with the Mau Mau. She drew some hope from the simple fact that his corpse had not come rolling down the chute too. Though it might at any second. The thought made her shudder until she forced herself to remember how good he was in a tight spot. Slate could take care of himself.

She was also puzzled about the pit door. The Mau Mau had boxed her in, forcing her toward it. That suggested open earth or a trapdoor that could be sealed off and covered with grass and weeds.

Well, whatever, she wanted out. Badly. The stink of death was having a demoralizing influence on her senses. She felt giddy and nauseated. She would have to do something and do it quickly before utter panic laid hold of her and rendered her completely helpless.

It would be so easy to lie down and close your eyes and forget everything. The grinning, bleak skeletons lying helter-skelter on the ground behind her might start talking to her any minute now. The thought galvanized her.

She braced herself against the dank wall of the tomb and took off her remaining shoe. She placed it at the mouth of the chute. She removed the pearl headband from her head. Luckily, there was enough X-757 in the tier of pearls to fashion a large enough charge to do something. The question was where and how much of a gamble could she afford as to the possibility that she might start an earthslide which would bury her forever?

X-Seven fifty-seven, courtesy of the Lab boys at U.N.C.L.E. headquarters.

She had known it to take apart a five-story building brick by brick– a mere three ounces of the stuff. It was effective, all right. The trick was employing it in such a way that you didn't take yourself with it.

She strove to think clearly, to remember the properties of the stuff, to recall some of the cautions and details which the Lab boys had specified in their analysis of X-757.

She found herself yawning. She shook herself free of the feeling, recognizing the dread symptoms of tension. Tension made you yawn; her aching muscles and nerve ends were shouting to be allowed to relax, to go to sleep. That would not do.

To combat the growing inertia, as paralyzing as any drug, she jabbed herself sharply in the palm of her left hand with a fingernail until she had almost drawn blood.

The sudden pain snapped her out of weariness. And defeat.

The loathsome stench of the death all around her seemed to lie like a pall in the atmosphere. There wasn't that much oxygen to begin with. What was left of the little amount filtering down from the opening in the earth above was foul and contaminated. She felt like gagging.

She was only sure of one thing.

She had to get out. And soon.

It was one hell of a place to die in.

The three Mau Maus who had been part of Kurt's plans for the people from U.N.C.L.E. sat crouched over a low fire in the heart of the Johannesburg hill country. They had paused on their long trek back to their own encampment in the brush, far off in Rhodesia. They had

become dissatisfied, as most natives will, with the machinations of the white man. They had also lost all desire for gold and trinkets and guns, due to their curious experiences with the White Devil man whom they had encountered on the property known as Allenbine Mining. The woman had been little trouble, falling easily into the pit. But the White Devil! One needed *ouangas* and all sorts of charms to ward off such a demon. Even as the Mau Maus gnawed briskly and silently on their meal of dried antelope meat, they shivered at the memory of Mark Slate.

They had surrounded him, closing in on him from all side, the machetes ready to chop him into food for the dogs, when he had literally vanished in a rising cloud of purple and red smoke. A geyser of flame and–the man was gone! Like a devil! They had known such things since the days of their childhood when the old men had sat about telling stories of the past. Terrified, the three Mau Maus had fled, scurrying like rats in the fields. Better their own land than these white demons who walked among men who wore boots and saluted strangely and talked of some powerful medicine for the people of the world.

In their own childish, uncivilized way the three Mau Maus had refuted the teaching of TORCH and the greed for diamonds and gold. So they sat, hunched and eating, pausing over a fire of sticks and grass to warm themselves against the chill wind sweeping in from the hills.

They were thus occupied when Kurt Ritzler stepped out of the brush, standing fat and angry before them. Auerbacken's Schmeisser machine gun held in his stubby fingers.

"Where are they?" Kurt called out in Swahili, the language of these hired assassins. "Why did you not wait for me?"

The Mau Maus rose, reaching for their machetes, not much liking this intrusion on their evening meal.

"We go," one of the Mau Mau said. "No more of this. We return to our tribe. You go. Now."

He poked a black finger toward the jungle.

Kurt Ritzler's eyes filmed over. His jolly face was frozen in a mask of contempt. "Talk first. Tell me where those people went. It is important that you should tell me."

"No," the Mau Mau growled. "Leave us. We want no more of white devils." A dark smear of blood on his right arm was crudely bandaged.

The fat man nodded briefly, as if that was all there was to it, then he raised the Schmeisser and tripped the trigger. Deafening blasts of gunfire reached across the clearing. The three natives, in the act of returning to their campfire peacefully, toppled like tenpins in a bowling alley.

Nighthawks screamed shrilly, wheeling away from the trees that

concealed them. The clearing grew silent, the echoes of the gun fading. The sticks in the fire crackled, one popping like a champagne cork.

Kurt Ritzler slung the strap of the Schmeisser over his round shoulder and lumbered off into the undergrowth, back the way he had come.

He was very unhappy. He had learned nothing that would satisfy the Leader. But there was one conclusion. He had taken care of three loose ends.

He would never again make the mistake of dealing with natives. As in the Great War, one was better off doing these things oneself. There had been great delight and glory exterminating the Jew. A good business for a proud product of the Nazi ideology.

Even now, TORCH would go on.

The Order of Reich Crusade Hierarchy.

Jawohl!

Serendipity

Randy Kovac, ensconced importantly in the Communications Control Room at U.N.C.L.E. Headquarters, was bored. At first, the assignment allotted him by Mr. Waverly had placed him among the very stars. He had looked forward with unabashed joy and excitement to the prospect of working as liaison between Dancer and Slate and Headquarters. But four hours had passed since Mr. Waverly had given him his head, and now the loneliness had dulled the technological wonders of the room.

There had been no word from April or Mark Slate. Apart from the fact that this circumstance worried him, it also contributed to his monumental boredom. The young trainee had long since solved all the mysteries and mazes of the immense control board. The flashing lights, the buttons, the blips, and the illuminated spots on the panel had been his first consideration as soon as he took a seat in the well-appointed room. As youths do everywhere, Randy had reveled in the importance of those buttons, lights, and blips. But once there was no more mystery, his enthusiasm had waned like the moon.

He kept himself busy with decoding simple messages and playing private games with the whereabouts of the entire Enforcement personnel, but this too, was readily accomplished and put aside. He had noted with some envy that Napoleon Solo and Illya Kuryakin were in Boston working on some affair that had to do with providing personal security for someone with the name of Alejandro de Cortez. He knew that name. Cortez was the scientist responsible for the development of a new technique for jettisoning rockets on capsules.

But–where were April Dancer and Mark Slate? Neither of them had called in. Young Randy Kovac could scarcely conceal his impatience. He eyed the illuminated control panel with its assorted lights of all colors and tried not to fume.

Darn it. First big job–and nothing was cooking on the burners. He was so distressed that he began to do mathematical equations and formulae in his head. Sort of a penalty for cutting Friday's classes.

He was midway in his imaginary Einstein homework when something *beeped* on the control panel. His eyes swung upward and his smile was wide enough to show almost all his teeth.

Johannesburg was calling!

Quickly, expertly, he made the connective relays on the maze of board equipment. The scrambling device that distorted all incoming and outgoing calls was always on the *Set* button.

"Headquarters he said brightly, his voice younger than ever. "Come in, please."

"Slate here," came the recognizable dry voice of the god he worshiped above all men. "Mr. Waverly, please."

"Yes, sir! Are you all right–?"

"Oh, my stars. Is that the voice of Young America I hear? Mr. Kovac, control your uninhibited emotions."

"Sorry, Mark–"

A light laugh bridged the thousands of miles between Johannesburg and New York. "Your concern is touching. Stout fellah. Now be a good lad and get me to Father, please."

"Uh–yes–" It was on the tip of Kovac's tongue to ask about April Dancer but training won out. "Stand by." He made the call transfer but with a shade of intrigue and a touch of rule-breaking he left the monitor open so that he could hear the following discussion:

"Mr. Slate?"

"Yes, sir. I'm somewhere in the bushes of the Allenbine Mining Company. We had a bit of a do here and I've temporarily lost contact with Dancer."

"Unfortunate. Go on."

Randy Kovac was never fooled by Mr. Waverly's curt conversations where the welfare of his agents was concerned. His own heart skipped a beat but his hearing fixed on Slate's full report. His eyes widened as Mark Slate made a brief, unadorned report, citing Simon Ashley as a TORCH figure of either importance or, at least, complicity, and relating his own conclusions that the underground activities of TORCH might very well be centered somewhere on the Allenbine Mining Company property. He had estimated the size of that property as in the neighborhood of one hundred acres.

"Yes," Mr. Waverly agreed. "Large enough to house them, I should

think. I'll get you a full report on Mr. Ashley before you call in again. What are your plans now?"

"Find Dancer, correlate the facts, and have a look-see at this bloody place."

"Hmmm. Allenbine…I shall ask the English consul in Johannesburg a bit about the property. See to Dancer then and call in as soon as you confirm your suspicions."

"Anything new from the world desk?" Slate asked wryly.

"No more than usual. The diamond market seems to have taken a sharp dip in prices. May very well relate to your assignment. We shall see. In any case, pinpoint this affair for us and we can take the necessary steps. Should you find yourself outnumbered, let me know. We can provide some added manpower."

"Roger. I can always buzz Interpol, you know."

"Uh–yes–suppose you could at that. Goodbye, Mr. Slate."

"Goodbye, Mr. Waverly."

The connection shut down and Randy Kovac slumped back in his chair. He was like a fish out of water now. Nothing to do but sit and wait. Sighing, he lifted himself from the chair and walked about the room. Almost defiantly, he paused before a bank of closed-circuit television screens which, properly numbered, identified the sections of the headquarters complex where they were located. The front of the building, Del Floria's Tailor Shop, the roof of the building, the main corridors, and other vantage points. For want of something better to do, he batted them all on, his eyes roving from one lighted screen to the next. It was just like Big Brother in Orwell's novel *1984*. Nobody had any secrets in U.N.C.L.E. Headquarters. Security could tell precisely when an agent had to go to the washroom, if they were of a mind to know.

Kovac grinned slyly as he watched the range of activity going on in the building. The Lab boys busy with some research work, that pretty brunette with the good figure adjusting her stocking in the reception room, the silent civilians on guard in the main corridor. Everybody on the job, taking ten or working out their particular tasks. It was only when his eyes focused on the TV screen that showed the front of Headquarters that the sly smile faded, to be replaced by one of suspicion and interest. Del Floria's sign was in view with the *Del* cut out of the picture. A large moving van was parked almost in the center of the street, the heavyset driver haranguing with a policeman who was busy making out a violation ticket of some kind. Kovac watched the scene with growing interest. The driver was waving his arms and putting up a big fuss. The cop was taking it all in but still making out the ticket. The van, a twenty-ton trailer-type job, bore the printed information on its gray body, LIBERTY MOVING COMPANY. C. Roth.

Randy Kovac frowned. Something stirred in his mischievous mind and nervous intelligence. He was fascinated now by the private movie playing on the home television screen.

He next saw a tall man, carrying a suit of clothes over his arm, walk into Del Floria's. The man wore a two-button tweed suit of gray and a Borsalino hat. He didn't even turn to look at the commotion in the street outside the tailor shop. That wasn't only next to impossible, it was unnatural. What person would not have at least cast a glance in the direction of all that?

The man disappeared into Del Floria's, the truck driver took his ticket, and the cop moved to the sidewalk. The heavy van started up and rumbled down the street. The set silent, no sound effects, but the cop was obviously shaking his head and talking to himself. Randy Kovac waited. The front of the shop was empty now. In a matter of seconds the tall man in the Borsalino and tweed suit emerged from the shop and he, too, soon passed out of the camera's eye. Randy Kovac took his eyes off the set, thinking quickly. It was crazy, maybe, but he felt certain he had just witnessed something that was far less innocent and usual than it seemed.

The palms of his hands were now moist. He swallowed. His throat was dry. It was difficult to brave the wrath of Mr. Waverly but if he were right–

With the utter enthusiasm of youth which counts no risks and ploughs on full steam ahead, he sat down at the control panel and made contact with Mr. Waverly's office.

He only had to wait a moment.

"Yes, Mr. Kovac?"

"Excuse me, sir," Randy Kovac took the plunge bravely and with great abandon. "Remember what you were saying about serendipity? You know, happy accidents–a flash of luck–"

"Go on, Mr. Kovac."

"Well, I've just had one and unless I am mistaken, something has just happened in front of the building that may mean a lot of trouble for us."

"Yes," Mr. Waverly said with great patience. "Tell me what you suspect by all means, Mr. Kovac. I shall be the judge. I suppose you had all the screens on and witnessed the moving van incident. I, too, saw that. But what makes you think it means anything?"

Randy Kovac gulped down a tinge of nervousness. Mr. Waverly had seen it, too–and he had gotten *nothing* out of it?

"Mr. Waverly, the moving van said *Liberty* and the owner was *C. Roth*. Does that strike a bell or something? And that man who brought a suit in for cleaning, he never once looked at the cop–"

"*Liberty. C. Roth*," Waverly said slowly, a certain amount of awe in

his voice. “By the eternal, I wonder…stand by, Mr. Kovac. I’ll look into it immediately.”

“I mean, sir, after all–”

“Quite, quite, Serendipity, Mr. Kovac–it seems to be yours in abundance. We shall see.”

Mr. Waverly closed communications.

Randy Kovac. Excitement glowing in his young face, sat back happily in his chair, winking at the flashing lights of the control panel. They seemed to be winking back.

It was great to be young and in the very thick of things.

Mark Slate crouched in the low dry thickets bordering the wasteland that comprised the Allenbine mining Company. The full moon had disappeared behind a bank of moving clouds. Darkness blanketed the countryside. Much as he wanted a cigarette, Slate did not dare smoke. He didn’t feel up to tangling with any more assassins wielding machetes or worse.

The ruse with the exploding capsule that let off clouds of colored smoke and noise had worked on the Mau Mau. All natives are superstitious and the poor fellows had run as though the Devil himself was after them. Slate had not given chase. He had been too busy running himself. Finally, when he had returned, it was to find April Dancer among the missing. He had covered every square inch of ground for a distance of a hundred yards and come up with nothing. Zero. It was if the earth has swallowed her up He was sure it had, but all his efforts to locate and discover a trapdoor or opening in the ground had failed. But the property was completely deserted. Even a search of the clapboard shacks and the deserted shafts in the distance had uncovered nothing.

It was if the very ground itself had been forsaken by the world. Surely by dear Simon Ashley. He had never shown up at all.

The touring car with Kurt Ritzler had disappeared, too. When Slate had finally navigated his way back in the darkness of the countryside, it was to find the car gone. Odd, too. The fat driver should have remained unconscious longer. But no. The car, the driver, and even the corpse of the man he had killed were gone. He had never even heard the motor start up. That was really odd. In such open country as this, he should have heard the sound from a mile away.

All efforts to raise April on the homing device and transmitter failed too. Every time he had tried, his own set had remained silent.

He turned up his coat collar against the night winds. His cream-colored suit had become a mockery of smears and muddy splashes. He sat in a thicket, brushed a crawling insect of some kind from his trouser leg, and tried to formulate some ideas. He couldn’t leave here

until he had some wind of what had happened to April. He tried not to worry about her. It was easier said than done.

Damn bloody schoolgirl with all her heroics and bright-eyed ideas. If she had gotten herself killed at last–

His thoughts were interrupted. Loudly and quite affirmatively.

He was flung back, his ears roaring, his clothes billowing. Not far off, the earth was shuddering violently and then a thunderous, mushrooming burst of concussion lifted the ground straight up into the air before his eyes.

The earth *moved.*

Smoke, thunder, and debris filled the air, raining down for an area of fifty yards.

Mayhem on Wheels

When his ears stopped ringing, Mark Slate took a look around. The blast, so compact and powerful, shooting geysers of earth and debris into the night sky, had settled down. Now the ground was still. Once more the wasteland of the Allenbine Miming Company lay quietly in the darkness. Dissolving clouds of smoke and fumes thinned, dispersing gradually until the winds washing across the area swept them completely out of existence. He peered into the gloom, decided on the source of the explosion, and started off in that direction. There had to be a crater of some size in the earth now. A big hole–

The joy within him was unleashed at flood tide when he caught sight of the running, stumbling figure. The blue dress was a tattered flag, the brown hair whipping loose, she wore no shoes, and she looked quite as if she had rolled around in the dirt for hours, but she had never looked better to him.

She stopped running when she saw him, recoiling before she recognized him. Then she sagged into his outstretched arms and he eased her gently to the earth. Her breath was coming in hoarse, racked gasps.

“Ah, there you are, Dancer.”

“Mark–”

“Steady on. Where have you been, you old stay-out?”

“I–I–” She sucked in some oxygen noisily. A wide rent in the bodice of the blue dress revealed the soft curve of her bosom.

“Positively disgraceful, Dancer,” he bantered, giving her time to catch her breath. “Running about the country out of uniform. You’re a bit of a mess, you know.”

She nodded, her eyes shining in the smeared, smudged face. But she had gathered some strength.

“I found the place–the tomb–where they buried all those agents. I’d still be down there if old X-Seven fifty-seven hadn’t gotten me out. I

guess I picked the right place to plant the charge. There was a chute and a pit. The blast worked outward. I figured it would widen the opening."

"You figured right. Can you stand now? We don't want to hang around here, you know. You didn't exactly sneak out."

"You're right." She stood up, stretching her arms. "Let's get out of here. You can tell me how you made out later."

He took her hand, guiding her back toward the point where the fat driver had parked the touring car. As of the moment, they had no transportation. Getting back to town represented a concrete problem. Still, the improved road that detoured into the mining property had forked away from the highway. Once they gained that vantage point, perhaps they could salvage a lift back to the city.

They ploughed over some dry weeds, navigated a gully, and gained the cleared area where they had gotten their first look at the Allenbine development in the moonlight. Nothing had changed. The ground was as forlorn and naked as ever. Only it was darker now. The moon had continued on its way and even the nighthawks had ceased talking. The only sound came from the soughing of the wind. It was an eerie melody.

April ambled along quickly at his side, hanging onto his hand. Lack of footwear couldn't have been easy on her. The earth was littered with fine pebbles, bits of mica, and scattered reeds.

"I could carry you piggyback," he suggested.

"Don't tempt me. I'm okay."

"Sure?"

"Sure."

They said no more, anxious to get to the improved road and farther away from trouble. April hurried after him but suddenly she had to brake sharply for he had halted, shielding her body with his own.

"What–?"

"Quiet, now. The rats do have a way of coming back. Listen."

The gloom of the land, not quite solid enough, thanks to the intermittent appearance of that full moon which was cloud-hopping, had been lanced by the powerful beam of a searchlight.

It was like a huge eye, not too far off, making a sweeping arc across the ground. Now they could hear the faint thrumming of a motor. It was a whisper of sound. The light moved, fanning out in its enormous arc of power. Slate cursed and pulled April to the ground. She went down heavily, her tired body incapable of a graceful movement. Too late. The light blinded them momentarily, moved on, then began to whip back. Slate grated in her ear.

"They've spotted us. Quick–there are some bushes to our right and

a big stone–"

She didn't need urging. She raced forward, hard on his flying heels. They both arrived simultaneously. But now the arc of light bathed over them, pinning them in a concentrated glare of exposure. Fortunately, the rock, a large boulder anchored to the ground, surrounded by a thin frame of thickets and foliage, lay at last between them and the source of the searchlight.

The low motor sound moved, coming toward them. It grew louder, but not much louder. The hum was steady and quietly menacing in a wide perimeter of silence.

"A bike," Slate murmured, uncovering his automatic. "With sidecar and machine gun. Two Johnnies."

"Dammit," April groaned. "I'm clean. No weapons. Couldn't afford to hang onto that headband with all the concussion–"

"Now isn't that just like a woman?" He peered around the rock. The searchlight had moved again. He jerked his head back. "They're going to cat-and-mouse us. Small wonder. They've got us cold. Maybe they even have last-minute notice to take us alive and all that. Well, we'll see."

The purring motor moved closer yet. April could hear it idling, perhaps some thirty yards off. The searchlight was now fixed on the boulder. She could clearly see the remnants of her dress, the multiple scratches and bruises on her tawny flesh. She winced. A great outfit to die in.

"That motor," Mark murmured again, setting the lever on his hand weapon. "A muffler of some kind. Must have been what that fat Santa-type fellow had on the touring car he brought us here in. That's why I didn't hear him drive off before."

"Never mind that. Can you see the men?"

"Nobody we know. Just brown shirts and mean faces. The glorious Fourth Reich, I suppose."

"We can't just sit here–"

"The first move is theirs, old girl."

It was.

A high, strident voice broke across the surface of the boulder. "*Achtung!* You will come out with your hands up. You have no chance of escape. Be sensible."

"Don't answer him Mark. Let him do the talking."

"I had no intention of so doing."

Again the voice called: "Well? You have five seconds!"

Silently, Mark Slate made himself prone on the ground. April followed his example. The silence grew ominous. They could both hear the man curse in German, then the motor thrummed again. A bolt-action kind of sound made a fierce click.

“The machine gun,” April whispered. “Ever see Western movies?”

“Very well!” The voice thundered angrily. “Now you will both die!”

Slate chuckled grimly. “You mean covered wagons, cowboys and Indians, and all that?” He sighted along the nose of his gun.

“That’s the ticket. We’re the covered wagon and those particular Indians are going to ride all around this big rock, shooting all the way. Get the picture?”

“Got it.”

“Dammit,” she said again. “I haven’t got so much as a hairpin.”

“Try this,” he laughed, handing her something in the gloom. Her fingers closed over it gratefully. A mere blob of capsule. A sugar-coated square of gum, like a Chiclet. But there was a difference. You chewed this one until the sugar dissolved and within five seconds a plastic explosive was set into action. “Be careful, Dynamite Dora. If the bike comes too close, we’re in for it, too.”

She was too busy working her jaws on the gum. The sound of the motorcycle drew even nearer. Now she could hear the full pound of the engine.

“I’ll go for the gunner,” Slate said. “After that, you’re on your own–”

He had hardly finished what he was saying when the beam of searchlight moved abruptly. The motor throbbed and with a burst of speed, a wheeling shadow of chrome and leather shot past their concealment. The bike was barely fifty feet away, cutting a wide circle about them. The machine gun opened up. A wicked, unrelenting medley of typewriter tempo. Staccato, blasting, death-dealing.

The angry whine of gunfire leveled the weeds about them. Ricocheting lead slammed off the immense boulder behind their prone figures. The traveling searchlight swung, pinning them in its awful glare. The motorcycle came around on the second half of the probing turn. The machine gunner, squatting in the sidecar, hunched over the blazing maw of the weapon, was facing them head-on now as the machine raced toward them. April saw the nose of the weapon lower. The next fusillade would find them. They were like helpless ducks in a shooting blind. There would be no escaping this withering onslaught.

The chattering gun, the glare of searchlight, the confusion of the moment telescoped into one urgent second effort. A split interval of time that meant all the difference.

Mark Slate’s gun made its peculiar coughing sound. The machine gunner jerked spasmodically, pawed at his face, the only part of his body reasonably a target. The machine gun’s chatter was cut off abruptly.

The motorcycle roared by their position, the hum now seeming to

thunder in their ears. April reached out and hurled the chewed ball of plastic explosive.

It was a throw of thirty-five feet. Not completely accurate but it didn't have to be.

A whiplash of noise, ground, and movement followed.

On contact with the earth, the plastic compound dug out a bucket of hard ground, geysering it skyward. The departing motorcycle was magically lifted to soar off the ground, and flung away as though it were the lightest and most plastic of toys.

It was done.

The motorcycle lay on its side when they reached it, one wheel spinning like a top. The machine gunner, huddled and inert, had been hurled from the vehicle, landing a full twenty feet behind the wreckage.

He was quite dead. Slate's single shot had caught him in the throat. They paid little attention to him, rushing to see about the driver.

The driver was pinned underneath his handlebars, one booted leg hooked in such a manner as to prevent his separation from the machine.

He was alive but he obviously didn't choose to remain that way. Even as they tried to release him from his seat, they could see his grim jaws masticating. His bloody face was almost smiling. The glaze of his eyes was awesome.

Slate tried to force the jaws open but it was useless. The driver died, a muttered "*Heil, Fuhrer…*" expelled from his lungs with one mighty whisper of contempt.

"Idiot!" Slate snarled. "Damned idiot! Why do they do it? Why do they–?"

He balled his fists and turned away, staring off into the darkness.

April, knowing how he felt, said nothing. Instead, she made a thorough examination of the pockets of both corpses. The Brownshirt uniforms yielded nothing. No identifying billfolds or bits of information. Not even keys or change or the tiny items that make up a man's life.

These were two of the usual ciphers. Only the fantastic uniforms and whatever it was that had driven them to essay a new attempt at world domination.

"Mark."

He turned back to her. "Nothing, I suppose."

"Not a thing. It's as if they were born wearing those uniforms. Too bad we couldn't stop him. He might have told us something."

"I'm not crying over spilt Nazis," he said grimly.

"That was a great shot," she said enthusiastically. "Old Deadeye Dick Slate."

He shrugged. “When my own life is at stake, I’m apt to be very accurate. You didn’t do too badly. You almost hit the bike.”

“I like that,’ she pouted. “Listen, if I had wanted to hit it I would have.”

“Well, why didn’t you?”

She stared at him, an impish smile on her face.

“Tell me. You didn’t want to *walk* back to town, did you?”

His serious expression broke and he bowed. “My apologies. Of course. Now why didn’t I think of that?”

“Well I did. Now give me a hand and we’ll ride back in style. If you don’t mind, I’ll drive.”

“Be my guest.”

The motorcycle had suffered a little from its battering about. The handlebar was dented and the sidecar was a bit out of shape but otherwise it was in perfect running order. April mounted the leather pommel and Mark Slate folded himself gloomily into the narrow sidecar.

She squeezed the throttle on the handlebars, got the motor humming, and pumped the gas pedal. The freedom of having bare feet was now exhilarating. Slate was shaking his head.

“What now, my love?” April asked him sarcastically.

“Nothing. But it strikes me that you are nothing but a tomboy. An incurable tomboy. You’re going to enjoy this and we are going to look like a circus act rolling into Johannesburg.”

She laughed gaily, glad to be alive, grateful to be out of the pit of the dead. The memory of those foul, rotting corpses hadn’t really left her yet.

“*Sans doute*,mamzelle.” He folded his arms and airily suggested that they should be gone. April nodded. The bike lurched forward, rose onto the improved road and zipped for the highway. The winds fanned across April’s face, cooling her skin.

“When we get to town,” she blurted toward the sidecar, “we better see to Mr. Simon Ashley, don’t you think?”

“I think,” Mark Slate agreed firmly, eyes fixed on the beam of headlight picking up the gravel and the blackness of the road before them.

Said the Fuhrer

“Thank you for being so punctual, Herr Ashley. We will speak English to each other so that you will understand more fully my displeasure with the events of last evening.”

Simon Ashley, immaculate and cool though he looked in his white ducks, was perspiring. Beads of dampness bedewed his smooth brow. His pencil moustache was limp. Dedicated–nay, avaricious–as he was

to the prospect of a high place in the new order, he had never cared for personal contact with the fire-ravaged man behind the desk.

The small cheerless varnished room with its white cane table and chairs and shortwave radio set reminded him too much of a damn bloody courtroom. A place of inquiry, judgment and execution. When the telephoned summons from Kurt Ritzler had reached him at his villa early in the hot Johannesburg morning, frightening his wife Ethel, he had felt a chill in his blood despite the near roasting temperature of one hundred degrees. Ethel had been a nuisance with her invalid's demands for care and attention, completely destroying the pleasant aftertaste of his night enjoying the charms of Sybil Brighton. And now this.

The drive out to the Allenbine Mining Company had left him with a feeling of dryness and nausea. He had very nearly driven right on by the hidden entrance to the underground complex. The walled door at the base of the pile of rocks to the north of the property. The door that seemed but a part of Nature's architecture.

"I came directly I got your message, Leader."

"Of course." The frightening face behind the desk, above the full uniform and polished boots, seemed to study his own. "Please explain why you did not fulfill your arrangements with dear Kurt last evening."

Simon Ashley hesitated.

"I am waiting for your reply, Herr Ashley."

"You may misunderstand, Leader, but I had to learn more about the woman. I wanted to be sure of her. That she hadn't left any bits of information about that might be harmful to the cause."

"So. Most commendable. And you also felt that our dear Kurt could deal with the U.N.C.L.E. agents."

"Quite." Ashley fingered his moustache.

"Fool!" The cane desk quivered with the downward slam of a fist. "The agents escaped, discovered the Death House, and killed two of our own people. There is no telling what it may cost us in the end."

Simon Ashley blanched. "But, that's impossible. Kurt–"

"–is a mere mortal and not a god. I would kill him and you, too, for this malfeasance of duty except for one simple fact. I need you both."

The head of Ashley Diamond Mines, Limited, was trembling openly now, fairly crumpling the rim of his Panama hat.

"I don't know what to say to you, Leader," he mumbled, eyes lowered. He had suddenly remembered how several prominent members of his club had mysteriously disappeared, never to be heard from again, with some trumped-up yarns about their selling out and moving off to far greener fields.

"I will tell you what to do," the Leader said with flat emphasis. "You will kill Miss Brighton before the sun sets. *You*–not Kurt. In that way I shall be assured of your allegiance."

"Yes–I'll kill her–"

"Good. Now as to the U.N.C.L.E. people–who are they in actuality?"

Simon Ashley brightened at the chance to show some spirit and ability as an agent himself.

"Your files are most thorough, Leader. The man is Mark Slate; the woman is called April Dancer. They are posing as an engaged couple ostensibly calling on me to purchase an expensive ring."

"So." The Leader tapped the cane table with an index finger as hard and inflexible as stone. "They now know for certain that you, Herr Ashley, are more than what you appear on the surface since you led them into a trap last night. What will you do about them now? They probably have reported to their superiors already–your facade is of no further use to the movement."

"What of their guesswork? Suspicions are one thing. They would have to prove their conclusions–I have kept my hands clean. There isn't a scrap of incriminating evidence at the office. Or at my villa. Don't alarm yourself, Leader. They can do nothing except make accusations–"

"You English." The new *Fuhrer* shook his damaged head. "You refuse to acknowledge a stone wall, do you not? You see it and still you try to batter it down with your head."

"I was merely trying to point out a possibility…"

"There are no possibilities when errors have been made. Very well. You will bring the U.N.C.L.E. agents to me. We must learn what they know before we do anything else. You understand?"

"Yes, yes. Quite."

"And Miss Brighton, your secretary?"

Simon Ashley swallowed. "I'll see to her as soon as I leave here."

Good. Now go. Come to our next meeting a half-hour earlier. We will discuss the situation in regard to the companies to the north. It is time for added finances. Already our treasury is depleted. There is an immediate need for allocating more funds."

His visitor raised his right arm stiffly in a mute *Heil*. The fiery-faced man returned the salute softly. Simon Ashley stalked quickly from the room.

Der Fuhrer waited, watching the door, his hands closed in a pyramid of blunted knuckles. Kurt Ritzler hurried in, his fat face expressionless.

He stood at attention.

"You observed Herr Ashley?"

"Yes, Leader."

"Follow him. Stay with him. If he fails to kill his secretary, you will kill him."

"Yes, Leader."

"He is also responsible for delivering those U.N.C.L.E. agents to us. If you have to kill him, then you will be responsible for that assignment. In any event, Herr Ashley will be disposed of eventually. By this time next week, he will cease to be of value to us."

Jolly Kurt now smiled happily. The Leader studied him.

"You would like to kill Herr Ashley, would you not, Kurt? Why? Your normal blood lust or have you a particular motive this time? Tell me."

"It is because of him that we lost Ernst and Ellenbach last night. Two fine men."

"Yes, of course. An eye for an eye. Go, Kurt. And do not fail. I grow weary of failure." The *Fuhrer* sighed his impatience.

"I will not fail," Kurt said, with a new authority in his voice.

Peter Ferrongo D'Arcy and his attractive fiancee, Jean Astaire, shared a pleasant morning breakfast in the dining room of the Red Garnet Hotel. They had a nice table by the picture window overlooking the main thoroughfare. No one looking at them could have imagined the fantastic imbroglio they had been involved in the night before.

Nor had they been observed leaving the motorcycle abandoned two blocks away from the hotel at three o'clock in the morning. Johannesburg had been asleep. The desk clerk, of course, had been a mite startled by April Dancer's bedraggled appearance but Peter Ferrongo D'Arcy had spoken idly of fun and games and a scavenger hunt at the Ashley villa and the clerk had discreetly made no comment. One could never explain away the wild escapades of the very rich. A five-pound note had done much to hasten this attitude.

It had been too late to do anything but turn in and refresh the body and the mind for the next day. There had been no messages or relays on the individual transmitters from New York.

Besides, viewed in the morning's early light that promised a scorcher of a day, the young couple was eminently attractive and personable. A condition which many a casual passerby on the paved sidewalk took note of as they sauntered by. A native woman with a child no bigger than a small dog waddled by, staring. April waved to the boy and he waved back, white teeth gleaming in the dark little face.

A breakfast of kippers, fried eggs, and large crisp strips of bacon, aided by brimming cups of coffee, made everything seem infinitely

better all around.

The dining room was semi-crowded. The usual assortment of English civilians, dark-skinned Afrikaans, and tourists on their very first stay in Johannesburg. The room itself was in the familiar motif of palms, bamboo appurtenances, and whirling, humming overhead electric fans.

"Peter, darling."

"Jean, dearest."

"I've been busy while you were keeping me waiting for my breakfast, you cad."

"Oh."

"I phoned the Ashley office. Miss Brighton is not on duty today. Seems it's her holiday. Does that interest you?"

Slate grimaced. "I'd be more interested in where the lady hangs her hat."

"Twelve Chamberlain Drive. Apartment One-A."

"You *have* been busy. How did you get that?"

"She's in the phone book. Brighton, Sybil A."

"You get A for Attention to Duty. I should have thought of that. I take it you don't think we should corner dear Simon first in his office and let him make up alibis and things for last night."

"I do not." April stirred her coffee. "Let him sweat us out a little. Meanwhile it would be wise to learn more about the woman in the picture."

"Couldn't be that she's a plaything for him? A decoration–something for his old age?"

She shook her head with violent feminine conviction. "Not with that face and that figure. I didn't tell you. Simon has an invalid wife. You want more proof?"

"I yield. Perhaps it might be a good idea at that. We'll break in on her before they can get a story arranged. Could be a good idea all in all."

"Glad you agree. If you don't have any designs on that seeded roll, may I? I'm positively famished this morning."

He watched her affectionately as she bit into the roll, without even bothering to butter it. Come hell or high water, April always managed to eat well. Healthy appetite for a girl with a figure as curvaceous as she had.

Which made him think about Sybil Brighton a bit more. Yes, April was probably right about that too.

Blonde Sybil was a tasty morsel at that.

The bomb that had been set in U.N.C.L.E. Headquarters was an ingenious bit of offensive espionage. Mr. Waverly could not recall,

from his long experience, a more clever bit of sleight-of-hand. Nor a more stunningly effective sort of bomb.

The moving van, parked before Del Floria's Tailor Shop, had propelled through an opening in its canvas roof a bottle-sized object to the roof of the building that housed the complex. There it had lain, harmless, looking no more suspicious than a discarded soda bottle until the proper moment.

A grenade-launching rifle had shot the bottle to the roof. When the U.N.C.L.E. scientists retrieved the bottle and examined it under their coldly accurate testing devices, it was found to contain enough explosive material to have gutted the buildings as far down as three floors.

It was even more complex than that.

The tall man in the tweed suit who had left another suit in the shop for dry cleaning had been quite as guilty as young Randy Kovac had implied.

The garments themselves contained no devices or odd objects of any kind, but once fluoresced under the lab lights, the terrible secret they contained was made known.

The buttons had been homing devices attuned to a similar button buried in the explosive substance in the bottle on the roof. From far off, at their leisure, the bomb planters had but to activate the device on the coat jacket which in turn would have triggered the bomb on the roof. All very simple and neat. The shuddery part of the whole situation was the closeness with which the enemy had come to succeeding.

A blow would have been struck at U.N.C.L.E. Headquarters from which it would have taken months, perhaps a year, to recover. Mr. Waverly was more than a little grateful to Randy Kovac. Though he was seated at his desk when he summoned the young trainee from the control board for a brief respite, he stood in awe.

"Splendid work, Mr. Kovac. My compliments."

"Glad it worked out so well, sir. I was pretty sure about that tall man not behaving as an ordinary pedestrian would have in a spot like that."

"Yes–but the truck itself…"

"Only started me thinking. What with this Nazi business and all. Liberty moving Company. I thought right away about the lady with the lamp. Holding the torch. After that, everything fell into place."

Mr. Waverly smiled. "Like C. Roth."

"Sure. A simple anagram. Scramble the letters and it spells out TORCH. Everything fitted in, after that. I do the crossword puzzles and Double-Crostics in the *Times* every Sunday."

"I'm sure you do. You have also inaugurated a new policy for

headquarters in regard to Del Floria's, young man."

Randy Kovac blinked. "What might that be sir?"

"We shall be very cautious, in the future, as to the garments we take in for dry cleaning."

It was the first time that Randy Kovac had ever heard Mr. Waverly make any remark that amounted to a *double-entendre*.

He laughed openly and Mr. Waverly laughed, too.

Then he went back to the Communications Room to keep a hot line open to Johannesburg, South Africa.

He still hadn't been able to ascertain if Mark Slate had caught up with April Dancer as yet. But the darn time zones and different parts of the day were so confusing at times. He had to check his wristwatch constantly.

When it was noon in Manhattan, it was seven o'clock in the evening in South Africa.

Right now, he calculated it was about three A.M. in Johannesburg.

The Bathroom Horror

Sybil was soaking in a tub of warm soapy water. The sudden benison of a day away from the office was unimaginably luxuriant. She felt like a queen. Simon had been so considerate. After last night, lovely last night, in that romantic hideaway. He had suggested she not come to the office. He meant to talk to his wife today. Ethel would have to give him the divorce. And then–

Happily and indolently, she let her long shapely body extend itself against the porcelain sides of the tub. The sudsy bath water, freshened with rosewater and dainty spirit of lilac, felt good around her. Love would solve everything. With a little bit of luck, she might even be able to lure Simon away from this dreadful trend toward Neo-Nazism. She was sure he had been duped. He was a great businessman but he just had no head for politics.

It was merely his dissatisfaction with not having served in the war; the long hot time spent out here in South Africa, the fever of wanting to belong to *something.* Anything.

Dear Simon.

He needed her. Perhaps that was why she had fallen in love with him in the first place. She had sensed that need, and despite her firm resolutions not to get involved in an untidy extramarital affair, it had happened. But it would all work out for the best now. It simply had to.

The water in the tub lapped at her ample hips, tunneled between the full mounds of her breasts. Always a sensual experience. She flushed almost guiltily. A long-dormant sexuality had been thoroughly aroused in the arms of Simon Ashley.

He had been quite gentle, really…even though she had no former experience by which to measure him.

She was rinsing the soapsuds from her face, deciding to let the bath water run out and then turn on the stinging shower. Cold after the hot. Always good for waking up.

She never did reach the gleaming taps.

She never saw the person who belonged to the cruel vising hands that came from nowhere and fastened themselves on her neck. In her monumental terror she tried to scream. She did not scream. Unfortunately, her blonde beautiful head was completely submerged under the bath water at the time.

It was a very deep tub.

One of those old high-sided vat sort of affairs that Henry the Eighth might have bathed in. Or Anne Boleyn.

It was a nightmare from which there would be no waking up. Her eyes bulged, her tongue thrust out, soapy water filled her mouth and throat. She thrashed spasmodically, violently. But the dark bulk of the shadowy man holding her under, seen in one last swimming, dizzying ebb of her life's forces, was indistinguishable.

Her ears roared in a cataclysm of thunder.

The last thing she heard were the bursting bubbles of air volleying from her lungs.

They erupted like depth charges.

After that, there was nothing else to hear.

"She's gotten more than the day off."

Mark Slate said quietly from the wide mouth of the entrance to the bathroom. At his side, April Dancer stood stonily. Staring down at the lovely woman whose anguished face bobbed piteously on the surface of the now cold water in the tub.

Both of them had wandered quite easily into 12 Chamberlain Drive. A smartly fashioned hotel well in from the main thoroughfare. One of April's hairpins, which was in actuality a fine steel lock picker had solved the door of Apartment 1A with ridiculous ease. But neither of them had been quite prepared for the spectacle of a floating dead Sybil Brighton.

"Too late," April muttered bitterly. "Just too damn late. That bath water's been cold about twenty minutes. We have just completed a wild goose chase."

"Dreadful end for a lovely woman."

"Let's go in the other room. I don't want to look at her like that anymore."

He nodded soberly, stepped aside, and let her pass. She moved by him, and to accomplish the necessary act of forgetting about poor Miss

Brighton, April busied herself with a rapid examination of the apartment.

It was a simple place. A bedroom, small kitchen, and a combination living room and dining room. Not very large at all. Miss Sybil Brighton had been a devotee of the arts. A multiplicity of prints from the French Impressionist School lined the amber walls. Bric-a-brac composed of figurines of ballet dancers and graceful horses rode pleasantly about the shelves and stands. A bronze bust of Nefertiti graced a bookcase that held the sort of books you might expect an Englishwoman of some breeding to read.

There was a handsome portrait of Simon Ashley adorning the bureau in the bedroom. It was lovingly inscribed; *Dearest Sable, Love, Simon.* April felt her gorge rise but held her anger in check. The main result of her search was that there was not a smidgen of evidence to link that beautiful blonde to the TORCH movement. She was beginning to assume all the pitiful aspects of the innocent bystander who had simply had the bad luck to run with thieves, not knowing what game they were playing.

Sighing, April flopped into the stuffed brown chair and ottoman set in the heart of the room. She brushed her hair away from her temples, suddenly tired. There was always something so final about situations like this. She had never really got used to the maltreatment of one human being by another. Especially when the murder was so brutal–and seemingly so senseless.

Almost angrily, she swept the receiver of the black telephone from its base on the stand near the chair. It was a French phone and obviously a private wire. When the operator's bland voice cut in, she gave the woman Simon Ashley's office number.

Mark Slate emerged from the bathroom, brushing off his hands.

"If you're calling room service, I'll have coffee. Black, no sugar."

April said nothing, waiting for Ashley's office to respond. It did. The voice was the same huffy, critical one she had spoken to earlier in the day.

"Ashley Diamond Mines. Who is calling, please."

"Rosalind McLaughlin," April said, matching the secretary's dried-out asperity. "Is dear old Simon about? I must talk to him. The property is sinking beneath my very feet–"

"Oh." The voice hesitated. "I'm very sorry, Miss McLaughlin. Mr. Ashley is not at his desk at present. I expect him to return shortly. Do we have your number?"

"No dearie. But I have his. Ta-ta."

She hung up, her wrath rising. She flung a look at Mark Slate.

"Dear Simon is away from his desk. He is expected back shortly. That give you any ideas?"

"A few. Not necessarily conclusive, though I expect killing one's paramour does require leaving the shop. Especially if you're going to drown her in her own tub."

"Check."

"It could have been somebody else, April."

"Negative. Ashley's in this up to his wilted collar, and all soft soap to one side, who else could have gotten into milady's boudoir so easily?"

"We managed."

"Well, we're different. It's our business to do things like that. Just as it is theirs, of course. But no, Mark. He had to kill her. Chances are he was ordered to do it to prove his loyalty. You know how the Nazi mind works. Either that, or she did know *something*."

He eyed the room with patient knowledgeable scrutiny. "Find anything?"

"No. But this is the capper for me. Ashley tried to kill us last night, now his secretary is murdered. It's time to move in on him and ask a few well-directed questions."

"Hear, hear. I also suggest we get cracking. There is a corpse in the bathtub that is not ours and the local police might not understand how blameless we are."

"I'm with you, and we'll call Mr. Waverly later. We really don't have anything to report yet except false starts. He wouldn't be that interested in this corpse."

They left quickly, closing the door softly behind them, snapping the inside lock. The hallway was deserted. In the rooms, Sybil Brighton's lovely body bobbed lifelessly in the tub of water. Mark Slate had gently closed the lids over her bulging eyes.

He didn't tell April Dancer that.

The deaths of appealing ladies always disturbed him too.

Simon Ashley was on his third gin and tonic when the telephone buried in his desk drawer *whirred*. He jumped as if an enormous gnat had alighted on his neck and bitten home hungrily. Sweating, he reseated himself at his desk and unearthed the phone.

"Ashley here," he said, his voice as dry as thin crackers.

"*Ja*. You did well, Herr Ashley."

"Oh–it's you, Kurt. Yes. It's done. But if you're calling to congratulate me, I'd rather skip the–"

"*Nein*. I do not pay compliments for duties. I have news for you."

"Yes." He tensed in his chair. "Go on."

"Those U.N.C.L.E. *Schweine*–the man and the woman–went to Miss Brighton's apartment. They saw the body. Now they go to you. You understand? They will again ask questions."

Simon Ashley bit his moustache. “Damn. After last night, how can they trust me? They already know–of course, they have no proof. You picked them up, saying you were my chauffer?”

“*Ja*. You see? Play the innocent lamb. While they play their own game.”

“Yes. Thank you for warning me, Kurt. It is best to be prepared for these things.”

“That is not my sole reason for calling.”

“Oh?”

“You will lure them to tonight’s meeting. Make your own arrangements. It is the Leader’s wish. He feels the time has come for a demonstration of our power to the masses. Two sacrifices to the glory of TORCH. To me has fallen the honor of the details.”

Ashley shivered. Kurt’s “details” could embrace everything from the Spanish Inquisition to Chinese torture. The cavern was a veritable monument to such brutal methods of killing.

“All right. I’ll see what I can do.”

“Don’t see.” Kurt’s voice rose in warning. “It must be done. The Leader must be obeyed.”

“Yes, yes. That all for now?”

“That is all.” Kurt hung up. Ashley stared at the phone before secreting it once more in the desk drawer.

He returned to his third gin and tonic. He had learned a deadly truth about himself that morning as he watched Sybil Brighton’s death throes grow weaker and more absolute. A truth of heady fulfillment.

He had enjoyed making love to her.

He had enjoyed killing her even *more*.

He no longer wondered why he had chosen to follow the Leader.

The bright red Renault, rented from the Johannesburg Tourist Agency, was a smooth running vehicle. Mark Slate was fairly humming as he tooled it expertly through traffic, skirting carts, bicycles, and buses. April was otherwise occupied, speaking in a low, unhurried voice into her cigarette case. The one which held a powerful transistorized device that made calling New York as simple as rolling off a log.

The sun (it never seemed to go away fully), was positively blazing down on the streets. The route to the Ashley Diamond Mines seemed to place the Renault directly under its burning glare. “Thought you were going to call Father later,” Slate said, breaking off his tune–another original jazz epic.

“Changed my mind. Woman’s privilege. Best to keep him posted. Now shut up and pay attention to your driving.”

He laughed and spun the wheel, dodging a helmeted policeman

who was poking his white gloves like stop signs into the hot sunlight. Car horns hooted. A running child on the sidewalk screamed in amusement as his playmates whooped about him like a band of Apaches. The Renault rode lightly. April concentrated on the cigarette case. To observers, she might have been checking the lid to see why it wasn't closing properly.

"Mr. Waverly, please."

"April!" There was no confusion about who was on the far end of the set. Randy Kovac's breezy, enthusiastic voice seemed to leap across the vast ocean.

"Is that Randy Kovac, the boy wonder, I hear?" April said reprovingly. "Why aren't you in school?"

"I'm officially permitted to cut classes today. Say–what's cooking out there in South Africa?"

"Eggs on the sidewalk, Junior. It's hot. Please connect me with Mr. Waverly."

"Oh–sure, April. Wait a sec."

The "sec" was just that.

The old man's parental dryness of tone issued pleasantly from the set. "Yes, Miss dancer? Go on."

Briefly, she filled him in on the events citing their present location and plans. She spoke quickly and briskly, knowing his fondness for a businesslike demeanor when in transmission proceedings.

Mr. Waverly was happy with their progress. Before he signed off, he had some information of his own to impart.

"You may run into some CIA and Interpol people down there. They are equally interested, you know. This business of the missing agents makes them keen for a bit of redress. So be on the lookout."

"Yes, sir. We'll coordinate with them wherever we can."

"Hmmm. Take care, Miss Dancer. Regards to Mr. Slate."

"Will do. Signing off."

She snapped the cigarette case shut and dropped it into her purse. Mark Slate eyed her sideways.

"Any orders from Father?"

"Yes," April said. "He said you are to make love to me the very first chance you get and that we should call the child Alexander in his honor."

The sudden riposte caused Mark Slate to explode with laughter, lose sight of the road, and narrowly avoid collision with a taxicab coming in their direction.

"April, you'll be the death of us yet," he choked.

"Better me than TORCH, Mark baby. Come on. Let's get to Ashley's office. I can hardly wait to see what a man looks like who has just killed the woman he is supposed to love."

That was no laughing matter.

Simon says "April Fool"

Desperation is an odd foible of the human condition. On one hand, one can expect it and be prepared for it accordingly. On the other, one may not expect it at all from particular quarters, and one then loses any advantage one has had in the first place. Which probably explains the drastic error that April Dancer and Mark Slate both made, fully dressed and in their right minds, when they went calling on Mr. Simon Ashley in his lavish private offices at his place of business.

"Please be seated," Simon Ashley waved them both to the chairs they had occupied only the day before. "I cannot tell you how very glad I am to see you both. When you failed to put in an appearance last night, I was thoroughly upset. Them I imagined you might have had a change of heart. Young love and all that. You see, natives aren't completely trustworthy and when I questioned my own driver–"

"Natives?" echoed Mark Slate with the proper degree of irritation that befitted Peter Ferrongo D'Arcy. "But the man who approached us in the Red Garnet lounge was a white man. Quite fat."

"Oh?" Simon Ashley spread his hands helplessly behind his wide polished desk. He smiled thinly at April dancer. "You see. Something is amiss here…You were jumped, you say, out at the property by three natives? And this–fat–driver pulled a gun on you? Dear me. I'm afraid, Mr. D'Arcy, they knew you were a millionaire and might have wanted you for ransom. We shall have to call the police on this. I fear for your safety–" He turned toward his desk phone. Mark Slate held up his hand.

"Don't bother. No need for that. We are still interested in purchasing a ring. Are we not, my dear?"

April stirred in her chair. She had just witnessed the all-time bluff performance. Ashley was playing it straight, as if he didn't know they were U.N.C.L.E. agents, as if he hadn't arranged everything last night. As if he hadn't killed his own secretary a very short while ago. She had to hand it to the man. It took raw guts to do all those things and smile like this. The Judas smile. Amazing, when he also knew that *they* knew he was bluffing.

"Yes, Peter," she said. "I don't care about last night. We're safe now and if Mr. Ashley can still put us on to something good, I would like to see it."

"You see, Ashley? Women and diamonds. One cannot keep them apart for long. Even in the face of death, Jean must have her ring."

"Speaking of women," April said, "where is that lovely blonde secretary of yours that we saw yesterday?"

"Ill, I'm afraid. Called in. Frightful toothache."

“Yes,” Slate agreed. “Teeth can be a nuisance, can’t they? Pity. Hers looked to be in excellent condition.” He looked at April as if to ask her when they would stop shadowboxing. April shook him off with a slight tilt of her head. She wanted to see how far Simon Ashley would go.

“Tell you what,” he said suddenly. “You are in luck, after all. There is a convention tonight. All of Johannesburg’s merchants who deal on the diamond market will be on hand. There’s something in the wind, you know. Prices skyrocketing–supplies being held off for a look-see at world conditions. Now there–there’s a fine opportunity for you to hook up to someone extraordinary.”

Mark Slate’s eyes grew cold.

“And this man out at Allenbine? Have you changed your mind about him?”

Simon Ashley made a face, fingering his moustache.

“After what you told me of last night, best to stay away from that vicinity. No matter. There are other dealers and artisans. I’m sure the convention will settle your problems.”

“Where is the convention to be held?”

“Northern part of the city. The Ferman Hotel. Rather a nice place. Large hall and all that. Care for some more gin, Miss Astaire?” He indicated the glass he had poured earlier for April. She demurred. Mark Slate had set his own glass down on Ashley’s desk. The head of the diamond company regarded them both almost fondly.

“All right,” Slate said. “We’ll go.”

“Excellent. You won’t be sorry. Now, it is a bit warm in here, isn’t it?” Ashley got up, moved to the blinds, and prepared to crank open the windows with the hand lever.

They had underestimated him, not realizing that his desperation would lead to an overt move right here in the very place where he wore his mask for the world.

April motioned to Slate that it high time to get the show on the road. Unluckily, the damage had already been done. When Simon Ashley turned from the window, that was rather apparent.

A heavy Webley revolver thrust from one hand. There was a conical attachment, perforated with holes, affixed to the barrel of the weapon.

“What the devil–” Slate murmured, surprised, still in character. April’s eyes popped and it was then that she experienced the first vague faintness in her blood. A fresh dizziness, an abrupt inability to focus on the objects in the office. She saw Mark Slate take a step backward, then fling out one hand to steady himself on a corner of Ashley’s desk.

“Really,” Simon Ashley said quietly, no longer a bland, smooth

drink of water. “Did you think me a complete idiot to believe that you weren’t on to me? But the mistake is yours. You see, I am a desperate man. Desperate men take desperate measures.”

“The drinks,” Slate said in an odd voice. “Mickey Finns. Is that any way for one gentleman to treat another?…” His hand fumbled for his inner pocket but the movement was painfully slow. Ashley poked the Webley at him.

“Not another mistake, Mr. Slate. You see, I do know who you are. And you, Miss Dancer. Both of you remain quiet. You’ll be asleep within seconds. No, nothing poisonous, I assure you. Rather a good dosage of sleeping potion. When you wake up, all will be very clear to you.”

April shook her head, feeling the drug take hold, cursing herself and Mark Slate for being taken like a pair of Firsts of May in such a simple way. But this was the desperation she had not banked on. The headlong open show of the false face in these surroundings. She settled back in her chair, the new inertia gradually closing her eyes. Her lids felt like ten-ton trucks. She just couldn’t keep them open. Dimly, she heard a noise. It sounded like a falling body. Mark…

She tried to open her eyes. She couldn’t.

From far off, she heard the now really bland tones of Simon Ashley. Simon Says…April Fool!

“…kill you both quite easily. No one would hear this gun in here. But we have plans for people from U.N.C.L.E. Great and glorious plans. Tonight you will be sacrificed to the greatness and the goodness of…” the voice droned on.

She had one last curious thought before she dropped off the cliff of consciousness into black nowhere.

Simon Ashley’s words didn’t sound like an *Englishman* at all. More like a parrot who has learned to think and speak by rote, tutored by a mountainous pile of propaganda tracts, pamphlets, text.

Yes, yes…that was it…

Today, South Africa.

Tomorrow, the world!

Swastikas and *Reichstag* eagles gleamed from the walls. The high ceiling of the vaulted amphitheater in the bowels of the Johannesburg countryside shone from the glowing torches set in embrasures in sconces around the walls. The empty dais stood like a solid emerald on a satin cushion. The massed group of people standing around in the amphitheater, conversing in low whispers, were waiting. A solemn, dedicated army thirsting for the next words of the new *Fuhrer*. He had not put in an appearance as yet. The immense cavern echoed with the

muttered conversations of those present. The hidden army, shining and new, in its boots and brown shirts and peaked caps.

This was the promised meeting of the day. A big day. Something extra-special and extraordinary was on the agenda. All through the day messages, phone calls, and summons had filtered into the maze of offices and homes where this silent army waited for instructions. Something was in the air. TORCH was ablaze with plans and expectancy. Perhaps a huge Putsch was in the offing. Maybe the day was finally nearing when they cold show their hand and take over the country. Wasn't the Leader forever promising that he would tell them the minute the time had come?

The bare platform was the cynosure of all eyes. Despite the whispered private conversations, the low discussions, the murmured growls of impatience. Why did the Leader not come?

There had been rumors about some trouble the night before. An explosion out here at Allenbine; the caving in of the crypt that harbored the corpses of the dead agents. But that must be all rumor and idle talk. TORCH was supreme. Who could have learned their secret? Surely, the leader would come soon now and ease their minds!

The torches flicker in their holders, casting on the polished walls of the cavern distorted shadows that resembled the branches and limbs of many tall trees.

There was no smoking. It was not allowed. Something to do with discipline, obedience, and the fact that somewhere in this independent underground world were stored vast supplies of explosives and highly combustible weapons.

Suddenly he was there.

Striding briskly and surely to the dais. "*Seig, Heil*! boomed in unison for a shattering minute of acclaim. The rigid right arms jerked stiffly toward the vaulted ceiling. *Der Fuhrer* stood on the dais, facing them all, his hands clasped sternly behind his broad back.

He was a figure for the ages. Something cast out of flaming marble and bronze. The unforgettably burned face, a travesty of destruction atop the stainless brown uniform, stared down at the audience.

The throng quieted.

The Leader was about to speak.

Torches wavered, as if the expelled breathes of all those on hand had threatened their very survival. The squat powerful figure on the dais lifted his scarred face.

"Tonight," the shrill voice rose on a note of announcement, "we will deal with our enemies. Tonight, you will see that our will is firm and unbending. Tonight, before your very eyes so that you may see for yourselves and never forget that the price for treason and noncompliance is death, you shall *witness* the deaths of two of our

enemies. Two misguided foes of our cause. It shall be a very special death. One that will make an impression on your minds. It is necessary that we do this. For our finest hour is at hand. Within the very next week, we shall begin the second step on our march toward supremacy. The first step was the forming of this legion. This union of souls who firmly believe that the *Third* Reich died only to give birth to the *new* Reich. The *Fourth* Reich. The greatest one of all!"

No one dared cough. A funereal silence had closed over the fantastic underground empire. The huge cavern would have magnified the tiniest sound, the merest note of disturbance.

Only the shrill voice of the Leader dominated that quiet; broke it, shaped it, and molded it.

The Leader took his hands from behind his back. It could now be seen that black leather gloves covered his hands.

The frightening, revolting face searched the very hearts of the group massed before him.

"None of you are timid or you would not be here. You were screened, examined, and tested. So you stand before me. My Brownshirts. Therefore, what you will see will delight your hearts. For some of you, it will be a reminder of the days at Dachau, at Belsen, at Auschwitz. For others, it will be but a foretaste of a rich and rewarding life. To see one's enemies die slowly and painfully is a valuable experience." He raised his gloved hands. "Come with me now. Slowly and in single file." He stepped down from the dais quickly and walked toward the doorless entranceway to the left of his stage. "To the crematorium!"

Like robots, they followed. Falling in step, moving uniformly and in great style. There was a noticeable stirring among their ranks. The crematorium. The place they had heard so much of and never seen. Yes, an experience. The stony faces of the men became grim and cruel; some of the uniformed women were so excited that there bosoms heaved openly beneath their tunics. A wild, orgiastic aura swept over the crowd.

But it was contained, straining, not allowed to reach the surface. Even the women kept their unalloyed enthusiasm in check. The latent Ilse Koch spirit in some of them yearned for expression.

This, then, was to be it. The very first exposure to the sort of duty that had characterized their births, their origins, their backgrounds. Memories of Nazi Germany made more than one set of eyes suspiciously moist.

As they followed, in single file, the squat impressive figure of the Leader down a long low tunnel lighted as brilliantly as the torches would permit, they could hear the light rumbling of machinery someplace.

A peculiar cranking type of sound that one could liken to a conveyor belt in motion or an assembly line in progress.

The leader led the way.

A Pied Piper of Destruction.

"This way, Herr Ashley."

Kurt Ritzler gestured down the tunnel, leading away from the small cheerless room. Simon Ashley nodded nervously, rammed his Panama hat down on his brow and hastened in the direction Kurt had indicated. This was but a few minutes after the Leader had commended Simon Ashley for his murder of Sybil Brighton and the prompt delivery of the two U.N.C.L.E. agents.

It had been an ordeal for Ashley transporting April Dancer and Mark Slate, unobserved, to this underground place. He had found it far too trying to wait around for the Leader to appear. Now he was anxious to be gone. Back to his villa, back to Ethel, where he could pull himself together for the coming days. He had the stomach for murder, yes. But he had also found out that that stomach needed many restoratives, gin and tonics by the dozen. The infernal heat did drain a man.

By himself, he had managed to carry the agents, one at a time, out the secret door in his office, down the stone steps to the private garage where his closed touring car stood ready. The long ride out to the Allenbine property had taken the last of his ebbing nerve.

"Take it easy, Herr Ashley. You have done well. The Leader is pleased."

"Yes, yes. I'm glad. But I need a breath of air. I'm tired."

"Of course. Hot work this business. Watch your step. There is a turn here in the passageway–"

Kurt Ritzler lumbered behind him, talking on, and Simon Ashley hurried ahead. His white sandals made slapping noises on the stone and dirt floor.

He moistened his moustache with his tongue, tasting salt and dread. He felt a dull premonition of disaster in the pit of his chest. He didn't like Kurt Ritzler; and his zeal for the Leader was always dimmed by close contact with the ravaged face. Still, the movement was everything. That–and the profitable future it promised for him.

"There," Kurt said in a light voice. "Go now. Wait for our next call. Goodbye Herr Ashley."

"Yes, Kurt. Goodbye…"

The fat man had paused. Simon Ashley hardly looked back. He should have. He would have seen the completely joyous expression on the Santa face and not taken his next step.

The corridor floor suddenly parted magically, dropping his well-

dressed figure some twenty feet into the pit below that it so successfully hid. Simon Ashley came down with a tremendous thump, a monumental fright choking him.

He tried to move in the utter blackness of the pit. Then he craned his neck upward. Fat Kurt Ritzler's jolly face was poised like a Halloween lantern just the rim of flooring, staring down at him. The little pig eyes sparkled with anticipation. Simon Ashley froze, suddenly aware of the movement about him, the small slithery noises that fairly came up from the ground itself. He was forced to turn and look–at the last thing in the world he felt like seeing.

Long black bodies, indeterminate, dappled with color, fanged and deadly, coiled along the dark earth toward him.

Kurt Ritzler looked down still, licking his tongue around the circle of his mouth.

Herr Ashley's screams were music to his ears. The dark pit exploded with his tormented cries for mercy. Very soon, the screams stopped and there remained only the beautiful sight of the snakes feasting. Sibilant whistles of sound filled the pit.

Fat Kurt jerked the hidden hand lever in the wall and the floor closed together once more. Satisfied, he clapped his hands. A pleasant diversion. But the best was yet to come.

Crooning a low Teutonic melody, he hurried toward the crematorium.

Even in death, Herr Ashley had been a mild disappointment. The pig had died so quickly.

Some Like it Cold

They were in trouble, all right. The sort of dilemma that might have been laughable if it wasn't so deadly.

Coming out of the unconsciousness induced by Simon Ashley's drugged gins had provided a decided jolt to their nervous systems. They both came round at approximately the same time but April was really the first to note the fix they were in.

She found herself strapped down, wide bands of leather securing her to a flat surface of some kind. It was difficult to tell exactly what. The place of confinement was low, walled, and bare of furnishings. There was a muggy sensation of closeness and heat. She adjusted her eyes and other senses until she was able to pick out certain facts. All the facts were uncomfortable in the extreme.

Most of her clothing had been removed. In fact, her sole coverage was her bra and silken panties. The leather straps ran across her waist and ankles. Her arms had been pinned to her sides so that the waist strap gloved her body, quite like a straightjacket. Strangely, she felt fine. Her head had cleared and her senses were alert. Only her heart

was bumping against her ribs, a molehill of dread in her breast that was trying to build into a mountain.

She was able to crane her neck so that she could lift her head a few inches. That was enough to discover that Mark Slate was similarly taken care of across the way. He was anchored down as she was, strapped and seminude, fastened to a long endless table like affair the ends of which disappeared into openings at either end of the room. Memory stirred in her mind. Unless she was badly mistaken, she could recall a conveyor belt system in an assembly line factory that rather resembled this. Conveyor belts. But the room was dank and stuffy. Almost a brick oven of sorts. Ovens–she held back a sharp cry.

Mark Slate had stirred. In the gloom, his green eyes seemed to shine like a cat's.

"Don't I know you from somewhere?" he said mildly.

"You have any miracles up your sleeve, Slate?"

"As you see, I have no sleeves. No weapons either. They must have stripped us down to the buff and taken everything."

"What do you think these harnesses mean?" She jerked her bared shoulder at the straps, the tables.

"I don't like to say."

"Say it. Out loud. I already have a good idea."

He sucked in his breath. His voice had an odd sound of doom in it yet he might have been discussing yesterday's golf score.

"These are conveyor belts, rather like the kind featured in some of your bigger and better funeral parlors. The corpse is set on this contraption and run into the oven for a quick toasting. Quite effective and unmessy, I should say. When we come out on the other side of the oven, we should be well done. To the bone, as it were."

"Ouch," she said. "I don't like it much."

"Neither do I. Let's think of something fast."

From an unseen part came the faint rumble and clank of machinery. The noise was somehow insidious. A motor humming on a low pitch of power.

"This must be the place," April sighed, her mind flying. "Where all the little TORCHers gather to celebrate. We're underground obviously. Probably right under that damn Allenbine property. Crematories."

She shuddered. "Right out of World War Two."

"Genocide. Sweet genocide. Can you do anything with your toes?"

She wriggled them. They felt a million miles away. Remote and alien.

"Sure. I did my nails with enough X-Seven fifty-seven to blow up this place but it won't do us any good unless we're free."

She was accustomed to paint her toenails with X-757 in the form of a carmine polish that was harmless until the compound was scraped

off and then ignited. But that was useless now, really. It meant little unless they could move under their own power.

She heard him grunt. He was straining against the leather band crossing his waist, raising his head so that his chin was rammed down toward his chest. She tried to see what he was up to but the gloom was thick in the dankness of their prison.

"What are you doing?" she whispered.

"I held out on you. Mustn't tell a woman all your secrets, you know…"

"Mark!" Her hopes soared.

"Hush," he commanded sternly. "If I can work these dental caps loose, we may have a chance…" Now she saw him press forward with all the strength he owned. The corded tendons of his shoulders and neck glistened with sweat in the darkness. She watched breathless as he lifted his head as far as he could from the table. There was a flash of white and a sudden small popping sound.

And still came the muffled rumble of the machinery. She also imagined that she heard a voice speaking. A familiar shrillish voice, almost shouting like a hysterical woman. For a moment, all time had stopped. Why, it was like–no, no–Hitler had not risen from the grave but the strident off-stage voice held all the wild exhortation and challenge of that dead voice.

She could not make out the words. Only the caliber of the tone and the fierce violence latent there. Then she returned all of her attention to Mark Slate. She heard him moan in pain and curse hoarsely.

"Slate," she said evenly. "What *kind* of dental caps?"

"The liquid ones, you idiot. What else can I use on this infernal leather that would make any sense?…" His voice trailed off and she knew what he was doing. Realized the sacrifice he was making.

Liquid ones. She winced. That could only be sulphuric acid mixture. God, how it would burn once it had eaten through the leather and touched raw flesh…

She tried not to think about it. Slate was thrashing like a maniac on his own belted bed. Her heart raced. And then she heard the heavy footsteps lumbering in their direction. Boots clicked and suddenly a shaft of dull light washed into the cavernous room. She turned her head.

Their fat chauffer, the bogus one of the night before, stood framed in the doorway. He was in full dress. The uniform of the Brownshirt. He looked somehow different. Like in character in a play or movie. The ruddy Santa Claus face was a mockery of time and place. He put his hands on his hips, the tiny eyes roving over them.

"Ah," he murmured, with deep satisfaction. "The guinea pigs are waiting. Well, *meine Kinder*, the party is about to begin. If you have

any last words, say them."

April bit her lip but from Mark Slate's table came a quiet, sarcastic rejoinder to the challenge.

"Very well. I shall. You are by far the fattest, most swine-like specimen I have ever set eyes upon and if you come any closer to this table, I shall most certainly spit in your stinking eye."

For a moment jolly Kurt's smile held, then it crumpled into rage and fury. Balling his big fists, he walked slowly toward Mark Slate's table. His butterball body was trembling with indignation.

"Fool," he said in thick gutturals. "I will beat you until your tongue hangs out. Then I will take your woman here. You would like to watch me make love to her, I am sure. That would be something to see, eh? But first, you must be punished."

The high ringing voice had stopped somewhere along the line. A deathly silence pervaded now, broken only by the click of Kurt Ritzler's boots as he stalked toward Slate, clearly to pummel him mercilessly for his insults.

"That's it," Slate called out. "Come closer. I so want to spit on you."

April, fascinated, was totally unable to take her eyes off the scene. She was later sure she had prayed. With an oath Kurt rushed forward, his arms raised in outrage. His fat body quivered all over.

The sudden rumble of the mechanism shifting gears, clutching and engaging, came to her ears. The wide belt on which she lay jerked a little and then began to move.

Slowly, inexorably. Like a treadmill, sliding toward the gaping maw in the dark wall that fed it into what had to be the concealed ovens. The belt on which Mark Slate was trapped was moving, too.

From somewhere beyond the walls of the compartment, someone had set the machinery of murder into motion.

Der Fuhrer waited, his mad eyes shining.

He had taken a seat up front. Behind him stood his massed cohorts. A sea of brown uniforms and extremely curious eager faces.

One could have heard a pin drop were it not for the humming sound of the conveyor machinery performing its function. Hidden generators throbbed mournfully.

The crematory was an ingenious fixture of the underground empire. This was TORCH, at the very zenith of its accomplishments and aims. But what would be the worth of such a device if one could not see it in all its marvelous glory?

The Leader waited proudly, hands pinned to his hips as he hunched forward in his chair. The ruined face stared ahead. His Brownshirts surrounded him, a tide of manpower, ready to do his

bidding. Ready to join in harmony with the frenzied spirit that had produced this rebirth of the dormant Reich.

Yes, the crematory was important.

It was a tribute to all that TORCH stood for. Nazi ideology, truly on the march. The strong shall inherit the earth. The weak must perish.

Had that not always been so? The survival of the fittest, the superman myth. Yes, yes, yes!

Der Fuhrer folded his arms now, his booted right foot depressing a concealed treadle in the floor close to his chair. The time had come.

It would be an object lesson in blood lust and fulfillment, an inside picture to be witnessed by the bearers of the new TORCH. The Leader waited proudly, anxious now for the spectacle to appear before him.

At his behest, and of own design, the crematory was absurdly simple.

The room was large enough to hold an audience of more than a hundred people. Similar to the main amphitheater where he gave his speeches. Yet the difference was the curious compartment that bisected the chamber. Running from one wall to the other, this was an enormous glass box, with transparent sides. Through its center, the twin conveyor belts were moving. Brick was one thing, of course, to contain the tremendous heat necessary to burn the flesh from the body in the scant ten seconds it would take for the belt to convey a body from one end of the room to the other. But that would have robbed the eyes of a spectacle. So glass had been used instead. A specially constructed glass, some five inches thick, which could withstand the fierce assault of the heat baking from within.

The Leader's ravaged face was mute but his eyes were expectant. He watched as the wide belts rolled inevitably. His focus was pinned on the entrance that led out from the prison room where the victims had been so carefully prepared. It would be a sight to restore him, bringing with it its fierce recollection of the dreadful night when his own face and flesh had been distorted by fire. The night when he had actually *lost* his mind.

A great murmur of wonder and awe raced over the assemblage. The Leader swept his hands high, calling for silence. Yet he could now see the reason for the sound.

A body was coming into view. A prone, insensate figure lying on the conveyor belt. The lower limbs were the first to enter the area of blasting heat and scorching fire.

The Leader's mind went cold.

He saw boots, a uniform, a mountainous girth of waist…

Trembling, shouting, he leaped to his feet, arms spiraling in outrage. His followers, taking this for utter exaltation, began to

duplicate his excitement. The hypnotic quality of the moment had made many of them blind to the fact that the body being conveyed through the glass oven wore the uniform of a Brownshirt.

But the Leader had recognized Kurt Ritzler immediately. Even as the features and outer garments dissolved magically and permanently under the assault of thousands of degrees Fahrenheit, he whirled to shout down his minions.

"Hurry!" he screamed in a terrible voice. "They are escaping! The people from U.N.C.L.E. have escaped!"

Population Explosion

They had indeed.

Kurt Ritzler had descended on Mark Slate with the wrath of a demented tiger. But only because he had been convinced that Slate was helpless and unable to fight back. Perhaps the greatest surprise of his life was the vicious haymaker that had come up from the gloom, thudding into his jaw. There had been no time for niceties.

Mark had bounded from the table, pushing Kurt's senseless figure off himself. The fat man had sprawled onto the moving belt. Slate had not bothered looking back. He had rushed to April and undone the harness that held her. After that, escape was all that mattered.

Both of them were mindful of the roar that went up as the belt bearing Kurt Ritzler moved out of the gloom of the walled confines.

"Roast pig," Slate said, holding his hand against his naked chest. "Come on, my girl. Out."

"The acid–"

"Bit of a burn here and there. But I'll live. Better than the oven, no matter which way you look at it."

Old habits were hard to break. In spite of his banter, a Luger was jutting from his fist. He had paused just long enough to extricate the fat man's sidearm. She shook her head as she stumbled along behind him. What a man. Sometimes she felt they had broken the mold to make him. All wit and brains and nerve. Slate had the guts of a godlike commando.

They found the passageway beyond the prison room and took it by mutual consent. The peculiar glisten of the varnished walls seemed to mirror them as they raced along. The intermittent torches, set in the niches along the route, gave off enough illumination for an entire amusement park. The ground underneath their bared feet was dry and hard. April held her breath, running lightly, storing up energy. They were out of the frying pan, all right.

"There don't seem to be any sentries or lookouts, Mark."

"Small wonder. They all went to see the show. But I suspect we'll see them all pretty soon. Kurt would be easy to spot on that belt."

"Kurt? How did you know his name?"

Egomania has its uses." Grinning, he held up the Luger. Neatly etched on the stock of the weapon were the gilded letters KURT.

The passageway widened, branching in two directions. When they reached the bend, Mark Slate pulled up short, holding her back.

"Hello," he said. She has seen the door almost as soon as he had. A wooden door, beamed and cross-slatted, that closed off a cavern of some kind. The door was stout and thick; there was only a grilled window visible in the barrier. There was, too, though, a painted word on it, large and very prominent. April knew the word. *Zeughaus*.

"Fine," she murmured. "Their arsenal."

"How jolly. Let's have a quick look-see."

Behind them, dimly rose a high hullabaloo of commotion. Voices shouting, people rushing. Boots thundering down corridors and along the multiple passageways that beehived this underground maze.

Slate peered in through the grille, April at his shoulder, casting glances backward. Slate chuckled drily. There was little more to be said. The means lay near enough now for a wholesale clearance of all this living filth and terror.

The room behind the door was crowded with barrels of black powder, cases of ammunition, boxes of hand grenades. Tiers of automatic weapons and armament were arranged in orderly rows. April spotted a large assortment of nitro-starch and high explosives stores in special containers. She was able to translate the German words that designated the contents of each canister. "Wish we had a bit of primer cord or a lanyard," Slate said wistfully.

"How do we get out if we set this toy factory off?"

He gestured down the passageway.

"The elevators have to be that way. Notice how the ground has been gradually sloping upward? Sure sign." It was true. The long lighted corridor was sloping gently, rising in the direction they were headed. "Game, girl?"

"What do we set it off with?"

He thought a second, sighting the Luger into the grilled window. The sound of approaching trouble had grown louder. Scarcely a hundred feet behind them.

"The grenades," he said. "If I shoot the pin off of one of them, the fulminate of mercury would be set off and we'd have about five seconds to–"

"Be yourself," she said harshly. "Good as you are, that's asking too much. Watch this." She hurried to the wall, and quickly lifted a torch from its sconce. "This will give us a running start."

He grinned, the green eyes approving.

"Tally-ho. You do the honors. I'll cover the passage. They're pretty

close."

He sighted the Luger down the long corridor. A booted foot was thrusting into view. He snapped off a shot; the slug whined and the foot drew back. April carefully sailed the torch in through the grille and saw it come down between a barrel of black powder and an open box of hand grenades. The flame of the torch whooshed, spreading with amazing rapidity. "Duck!" she yelled.

Slate needed no urging. He put his head down and ran. April sprinted too. Voices bellowed behind them now. But she was sure no one had witnessed the toss of the torch. A hand machine gun chattered briskly now, chewing up the ground at their heels as they rounded the next fork of the passageway.

Ahead loomed an elevator car. Wordlessly, they reached it and leaped in. Slate slammed the steel door shut, batted the *Up* lever, and fell back against the wall of the car, breathing heavily. April sagged, too. For one long second, as the car rose rapidly, their eyes met. Slate blew her a roguish kiss but the green eyes were saying things they had never spoken aloud.

Things like, *If this is it, old girl, and we don't make upstairs before all hell breaks loose, I want you to know it has been a great pleasure knowing you. Fact is, I'd fall in love with you if you weren't such an infernal career girl.*

April could only look at him, wondering why in God's name they had never stopped to have a little fun somewhere along the way. Especially now, when it might be too late, when they might never have the chance again. Time and life were on the wing.

Mercifully, it was a short trip. The surface was closer than either of them had dared to hope.

The steel door slid into its groove, opening to reveal a short stretch of polished floor leading to a door of stone. They raced for it. Slate pulled the barrier back and they stepped into almost blinding sunshine. The door fell back, merging with the mountainside, camouflaged as only nature-*cum*-opportunistic man can manage. Slate blinked in the light.

They were on the furthest tip of the Allenbine property. He had spied some familiar landmarks. A row of dead trees to the north. A diagonal hillock of earth cutting toward the clutter of abandoned shacks.

About them, thick copses of bushes and foliage revealed a veritable motor pool of automobiles, motorcycles, Lambrettas, and other vehicles of transportation.

"Let's get out of here. Shall we go tandem or pick a bike each? I much prefer a car…"

April was puzzled. "Damn. We should have heard something by

now. Unless they tumbled–"

"Don't bother your head about that now. We're lucky to be alive, as my sainted aunt used to say."

She had to agree with that. "Maybe we should have fouled up that elevator…"

"Come along, will you? No time for that now."

They started for one of the machines that was closest. A small car of foreign make that might have been a Volkswagen but wasn't. It stood just to the left of the camouflaged door.

And then they were flung to the ground, hammered down by the force that now shook the very earth. A gigantic boom cannonaded from the depths below them. A series of thundering, consecutive blasts that filled the far reaches of the countryside.

The earth held. The mountainside did not yield. Soon the blasts were echoing dimly. And then they ceased, A hawk screamed in the vicinity of the dead trees and flew off with a frightened flurry of black wings.

It was almost nightfall. The blinding sun was a doomed ball of orange, dripping blood-red rays over the horizon. The long Johannesburg day was ending on an appropriate note.

Slate checked the car keys. There were none. He sighed and scrambled out to look under the bonnet of the car. April looked down at her bra and panties, suddenly realizing as a woman will at very odd times, the state of her dress.

"I'll have to play with the wires a bit," Slate sighed. "Take only a moment, old girl."

She nodded, watching the camouflaged door, holding his Luger in position. "Think that ended them off, Mark?"

"Should have been *fairly* messy. One swell swoop. We'll check with the CIA or whatever in town, send out a bunch of diggers, and see what they come up with. I should say this TORCH has burned out, though. There must have been an army of them down there. Did you see that uniform Kurt was wearing?"

"Yes. Brownshirt. Storm Trooper stuff, all right. Wonder who the head man was?"

"Well," he said from under the hood, "Dear old Simon will have to answer to that. Unless he was down there too. We may never know."

He slammed down the hood. "Done. You drive. Start her up, will you? Just kick the gas pedal and–"

He checked himself, his eyes drawn toward the stone door. It was opening. A ghastly figure came bounding through, the clothes scorched, the boots charred, the powerful squat figure staggering. For a moment, it was easy to believe that the ravaged, flame-withered face had just received a baptism of fire. But, no. Now they could both see

the dreadful scar tissue, the surface of a face with long pitted eyes and a gash of mouth.

The man reeled to a full halt when he saw them. He straightened from a lurching position. Too late, April cried out for him to stop and talk things over. The Leader had reached some personal limit of his own endurance.

The automatic machine gun in his right arm snapped up, meeting the cradle of his left arm. The hairless burned face, awesome now, became inflamed with the fury of a god denied the right to his own heaven. The machine gun sputtered.

April Dancer had no alternative. If there had been one, she would have taken it. The man would have been valuable to U.N.C.L.E., if only for the information they could have pried from him.

The Luger in her hand spat once. A single shot.

The fire-ravaged man went down, the machine gun poking into the ground, thudding lead, stuttering in staccato violence. The Leader, whom April Dancer and Mark Slate had never met, lay quietly on the dead grass at the base of the concealed door, moaning softly. April's bullet had caught him in the chest. High in the chest.

They reached him: he was choking. Slate knelt at his side, scrutinizing the weird face. April restrained a shudder of pity. The pitted eyes were alight with some inner sadistic madness.

"…world conquest…by diamonds…" The dying man coughed. A spittle of blood and saliva flecked the lipless gash of mouth. "…money to rule the earth…fools, all fools…it is the end of it…"

"Tell me," Slate said mildly, "who was your leader?"

The sightless fool gleamed.

"…fool. Don't you recognize me? I…I was their leader…the new *Fuhrer*…I would have crippled the world, brought it to heel…" The words eddied off, like bubbling ripples in a stream. Slate crouched down, lowering his ear to the bitter mouth. "…the French, the Dutch, the English…American…German…Polish, Russian…Red Chinese…all marching for the glorious Fourth Reich…"

"Your name," Mark Slate said. "What is your name?"

The Leader summoned up his fading strength. The gash of a mouth twisted. Blood foamed. A whisper of rattling words emanated from the depths of him. "You don't recognize me?"

"No."

April couldn't take her eyes off the hideous face, now made pitiful by the mute inexorability of dying.

"I…am…*der Fuhrer*…." The body stiffened and the name seemed to bolt from the soul of the man. "*Adolf Hitler*!"

Mark Slate straightened; a dead man lay at his feet. April shook her head. The dictator fever. It would never end. The crazy desire to

play God. To rule the world. To be something that has plagued mankind since the Garden of Eden. Like THRUSH. Like TORCH. Like so many little men wanting to be bigger than they ever really were in the first place.

It was all so cockamamie, this hunger for power.

"I wonder," Mark Slate said, probing an eye with his forefinger.

"What do you wonder?"

"Oh, about flaming bunkers in Berlin and bodies that were never really recovered."

She shuddered. "Forget it. Just another fugitive from a laughing academy with ants in the mental pants."

He nodded, tired, the green eyes grim. "Well, let's frisk him, get back to town, and ring up Father. He must be worried blue about us."

"Yes," April smiled. "Dear old Dad."

The ball of sun over Johannesburg went down. And out. Not unlike the TORCH movement which had finally doused its own growing flame with the death of the fired corpse in the dry grass.

April rubbed her bare shoulders, and thought about New York and Headquarters. The Torch Affair had wound up on the credit side of the ledger. It would be great to see Mr. Waverly again. And Napoleon Solo. And Illya Kuryakin.

Yes–and Randy Kovac, too.

U.N.C.L.E. men were a helluva a lot better company than raving maniacs who were out to rule the whole show.

Mr. Alexander Waverly settled back in his chair and closed his fingers contentedly about the bowl of a briar pipe. To his great satisfaction, and his pleasure of a personal nature, he had just completed a conversation with April Dancer.

Miss Dancer and Mr. Slate had met with extraordinary success in South Africa. A triumph none the less remarkable for the short span of time in which it had been accomplished. There would be little to worry about from TORCH now. The most powerful Neo-Nazi movement yet had come to a full stop. For the time being, at any rate.

There was only one urgent thought on Mr. Waverly's always active mind. It was a bit of fun, really.

He was idly calculating what figure would appear on Miss Dancer's expense account for the assignment. He smiled to himself, sure of one unassailable certainty. Whatever it might be, it was bound to be *lower* than Mr. Slate's.

There was a lot to be said for that sort of thrift and frugality.

The girl from U.N.C.L.E. always set a fine example for the men from U.N.C.L.E.

One that Mr. Alexander Waverly always only wistfully hoped they

would follow.